

A Retail State of Mind

Operators use a mixed bag of methods to attract customers.

Retail locations in foodservice have become a vital way of generating revenue. Be it coffee bars or snack carts, retail options give customers choices, which improves customer satisfaction. To drive retail business, operators have had to get creative by developing retail marketing.

When the Illy coffee bar in the New York Times Building opened last year, Patricia Sharp, foodservice director for Restaurant Associates at the location, says her department used several promotions to get the word out, including offering a free cup of Illy drip coffee to customers on opening day. The most successful promotion was during the first six weeks of operation when her department raffled off Illy espresso machines each week.

“People were excited to have the chance to win their own personal espresso machine,” says Sharp. “We had one person write out more than 20 raffle tickets for one day.”

Simple strategies: For Maureen Husek, director of nutrition and retail services at Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, Mich., traditional marketing techniques work best in attracting business to not only her 10 foodservice retail but also her six retail stores. One central retail location within the 1,048-bed hospital is the more than 200-seat South Tower concourse. The concourse is home to a Starbucks, Ben and Jerry’s Scoop Shop, a flower cart and a food court. The food court has a rotating ethnic cuisine station that changes monthly and a deli/bakery. Elsewhere on the property, Husek manages several coffee carts, a maternity store and a yarn



Hofstra’s Pizza Xchange appeals to health-conscious students with salads as pizza toppings.

store that offers knitting classes.

“The yarn store has been very popular, particularly with the classes we offer,” Husek says. “We do knitting events where volunteers come in and knit blankets for the patients.”

Husek says the marketing for the retail spots appears in the hospital newsletter, which she makes available to visitors.

“We keep copies in the gift shop so as the customers go into one area, they see what’s going on in other areas,” Husek says. “Employees also receive a weekly memo, where they read about

what’s going on.” Patients receive a handbook with information so they know what retail outlets the hospital offers. “People even do their Christmas shopping here,” Husek adds. Another tactic was the implementation of a payroll deduction system for hospital employees. The system encourages employees to dine and shop in the retail areas and business has increased.

Hofstra University in Hempstead, N.Y., is made up of about 60% commuter students, so a lot of thought goes into ways to attract them to eat on campus. Lisa

Lahiji, director of campus and university marketing for Lackmann Culinary Services, the university’s foodservice provider, says to capture those commuter students for Hofstra’s all-retail dining program, her department put together a “Top 5 Reasons For Commuters to Eat On Campus” list. The list included reasons like “Savings—when you purchase a meal plan, you save on tax” and “24-hour dining service—anywhere on campus at anytime, you can find something to eat.”

“We have a marketing plan in place for commuters to drive sales,” Lahiji says. “We have increased communication with the Commuter Student Association.” As an all-retail dining program, Hofstra offers concepts like Pizza Xchange, which features salads as pizza toppings and a Maui Tacos outpost. Both offer delivery, which helps attract business that might otherwise be lost to off-campus chains.

It’s all in the brand: Schools in the Turlock (Calif.) Unified School District, have recently received an upgrade in foodservice. Food Services Director Scott Soiseth took marketing to the next level by branding his entire program. He hired a private marketing group to develop the brand called “Real Fresh.” This past fall, he introduced the program to his 14 schools, and he is happy with its success so far.

“The ‘Real Fresh’ brand was geared toward the entire program, but the National School Lunch kids really grabbed onto it because their menu changed drastically. Our NSLP participation doubled,” Soiseth says. Now, since his participation in NSLP increased so much, he is looking for ways
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Branching Out

A brand makeover helped Columbia U stand out from the NYC coffee crowd.

In a city that never sleeps, there are infinite ways to keep students busy, caffeinated and fed. To that end, Columbia University Dining Services competes with several commercial restaurants in the neighborhood, so it is very important for dining services to create distinct brands that entice the

jaded New York City student palate.

Columbia offers 15 on-campus retail locations, including five Blue Java coffee bars, a European-style marketplace and a kosher deli. All locations accept Dining Dollars, which Lisa Miller, marketing coordinator for special events, says is one of the best ways for Dining

Services to entice students to eat on campus. But to really take student business back from outside competition, Dining Services did a complete brand makeover of its five Blue Java coffee bars last summer. At the time, Blue Java was already serving 100% fair trade and organic certified products, but most of the students were unaware of it, Miller says.

“We needed to better amplify our commitment to sustainability by re-positioning the brand in the minds of our target audience,” Miller says. “Our ob-

jective was to brand Blue Java as the most socially and environmentally responsible coffee products available in the Columbia neighborhood, which offered a unique point of distinction.”

To achieve that objective, a new logo was created as well as an overall look and feel for the Blue Java locations. The new design was incorporated into all the in-store menu boards, cups, uniforms and in its Web presence. As New York City’s first university to serve exclusively fair trade and organic certi-
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to re-attract the à la carte customers. His answer was to improve his retail sites. At the largest high school in the district, with about 2,400 students, there are several snack bars and drivable carts where kids can go besides the main cafeteria.

“The carts have been very successful, averaging about \$300 per lunch,” Soiseth says. “They can go where the kids are. The National School Lunch kids have reaped the benefits of the retail marketing and now we’re seeing the paid kids come back with the introduction of new concepts.”

One of those is ‘Real Fresh’ grab-and-go lunches. The lunches will be served in a lunch bag with the “Real Fresh” logo, and each will be geared toward a different group. One will be for athletes who need more protein and carbohydrates, and one will be full of lower calorie items like fruit.

Soiseth is having a freestanding unit built for these grab-and-go meals that will be on the high school’s patio.

“With the retro design, we were hoping to attract the kids out there,” Soiseth says. “It’s like a shiny fishing lure; it’s different.”

For branding programs, Soiseth says, his advice is to hire outside help.

“We spent close to \$30,000. I worked on it for more than a year alone but it always stalled. Hiring outside help was definitely worth it. Now the brand is our promise and our foundation.”

by Lindsey Ramsey



As a promo, RA raffled off espresso machines.

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Branching Out

fied coffee across its entire campus, some interesting marketing tactics were used to roll out the brand.

“We designed custom cup sleeves made from 100% post consumer recycled material that include a definition for a term that defines the Blue Java brand,” Miller says. “We pointed out that we were the only university in

NYC to offer this kind of coffee exclusively.”

As part of the new branding, Miller says dining services revitalized its “bring your own mug” program to reduce waste. The department designed a Blue Java reusable mug, which Miller says has been very popular—about 1,000 have been sold since the launch.

When students use the mug, the receive a discount. Miller says the sales of the new mug along with the overall reusable mug usage have both increased dramatically.

Along with the mug program, Miller says dining services developed an awareness campaign to coincide with Fair Trade Month in October. A dedicated Web site was created along with displays filled with fair trade materials, a distribution of Blue Java mugs, and a “Fair Trade & A Little Local” theme dinner that showcased Blue Java and local items. On Halloween, Dining Services hosted a fair trade “Trick or Treat” at all the Blue Java locations. Customers got a branded single serving of Blue Java’s coffee to brew at home, a fair trade chocolate bar and information on fair trade.

“Our re-branding and marketing efforts led to a clear increase in customer awareness of Blue Java’s commitment to sustainability, which reinforced our point of distinction and built brand loyalty,” Miller says. —LR



Retail Details

For an all-retail campus, one director balances new devices against old tactics.

Helen Wechsler, director of dining services at **Boston College**, knows how to market for retail sites as well as anyone, maybe even more so, considering she manages an all-retail campus. Wechsler speaks about the importance of time-tested marketing tactics as well as those that take a little ingenuity in increasing her business of 22,000 transactions each day.



Helen Wechsler

“We have nine retail locations

and, within those, we have about a dozen different self-branded concepts. For example, we have an Italian concept called Mozzarella’s, a grill concept called The Chestnut Hill Grill, a wrap concept called Wrapsody and an Asian concept called Wok Away. Most of those concepts are located on sites that serve more than 6,000 people a day. We also have smaller locations like a deli called The Eagle’s Nest and a very popular concept called The Chocolate Bar, which serves chocolate and coffee.

Our Web site is the best marketing tool we have. We are careful with how often we send e-mail blasts to students because they will just erase them, so we only send out those blasts about four times a year. In the last year, our Web site has improved tremendously because we are doing more of it internally. I’m actually surprised at how much the students go on the Web site to see where things are happening and what’s going on in dining. They’ll have a favorite soup, salad or sandwich, so they’ll look to see if that item is being served anywhere. The site also makes great use of a “What’s New” section, where we can detail anything from promotions to contests. If we are marketing a new product, we’ll partner with our vendor relations, and we heavily market those partnerships when we do them, especially when we do a concept refresh or a seasonal change. For example, on the Web site we showcased one of our vendors that worked on all these different vegetarian and vegetable recipes for a seasonal change. That kind of thing is very effective for us.

The school newspaper follows our Web site closely, so we also market through articles in the paper, most of which are positive. But one of the old-fashioned ways of marketing is still one of the best for us, which is word of mouth. We do this organic, grass-fed burger program at one of our locations, and the promotion of that was all word

of mouth. We put some signs up and co-branded with the vendor but really, in the end, it was all word of mouth. When I see students open their cell phone and call their friends when they’re standing in line, that’s probably my most effective marketing.

When we do market new products with vendors, they’ll often give out samples. Our soup vendor will come in and try to showcase new soups, so they’ll set up a table and give away samples, and we have the students vote on which soup they like the best.

‘We are careful with how often we send e-mail blasts to students.’

Our students don’t read a lot of pamphlets. We don’t do table tents because they just disappear and turn into trash. When we launched a farmer’s market in the fall, we promoted that by hanging banners all over campus and it was pretty successful. Another successful tactic for us is if I am introducing a new concept, we take it on the road at dinner. So we’ll go to the other locations and feature it because dinner is when we get the biggest hit.

Finally, one of our greatest tools is our logo and branding. A few years ago, we came up with the logo and the “Feed Your Mind” tag line. We use that to market our entire BC Dining brand. We also use “Eat, Drink, Talk, Think” and we play on that, so in the units right now we’re doing a big recycling drive, so we have “Eat, Drink, Talk, Recycle.” At this point, if people see our smiley face, it’s like the Nike swish, they know it’s BC dining.”