



Food Marketing & Design

10 ● ESSENTIAL Tips FOR *Foodservice Marketers*





***Everyone could
use a little advice
on navigating this
dynamic landscape.***

As a foodservice marketer, it can be challenging to know exactly where to allocate your marketing dollars, and your criteria for success can be quite different from your retail counterparts. As an agency with nearly three decades of foodservice marketing experience with industry-leading brands, we've identified our top 10 tips to help you lay the foundation for a profitable future.

#1 *Define your brand position*



There's often the perception that foodservice advertising can be a "sea of same" with indistinguishable messages, copy/paste imagery, and similar product offerings. But each company has a unique story and value proposition that can unlock where its true differentiators lie. It's surprising to us how few companies take this important step and instead rely on tired messages that don't resonate with foodservice operators.

One of the first things we do with new clients is help them build out their brand foundation, marketplace positioning, and visual strategy. Crafting these approaches provides cohesion among all touchpoints, resulting in more impactful creative — and higher returns. We've also found that it takes a campaign from product features to actual benefits that resonate with operators on a much more emotional level. For example, one of our clients had a portfolio of top brands and relied on that operator message for many years. The problem? Their top competitor could claim the same thing. Through our process, we unlocked a new approach that took their campaign to a whole different level.

“Every company has a unique story to tell. There is real power in unlocking key differentiators and bringing them to life.”

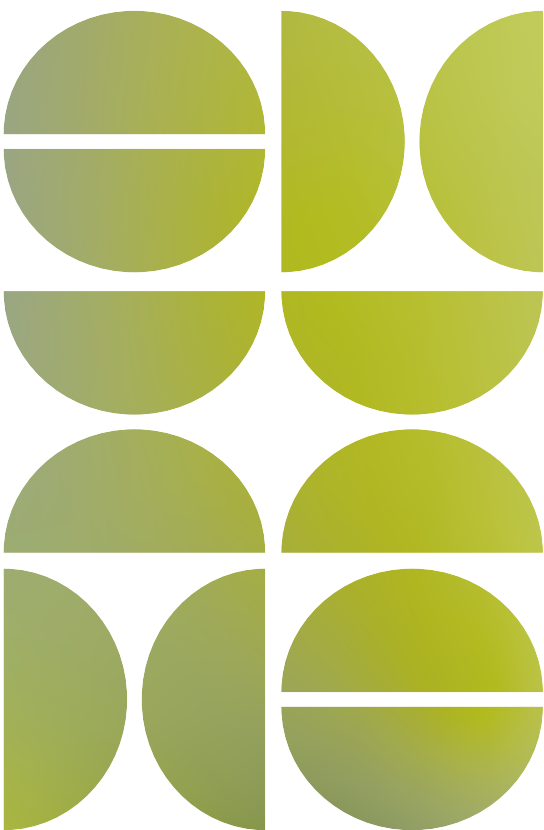
BETH LUBE, ACCOUNT DIRECTOR

+ DIG IN *What is your current brand positioning? Is it still accurate or discernible from your top competitors?*





#2 *Forge operator bonds beyond your sales force*



With over 750,000 restaurants in the US and countless other foodservice locations such as K-12 schools, colleges, hospitals, and office cafeterias, it's impossible for a sales team to reach even a small percentage of them. We strongly recommend investing in ways to build your brand awareness and drive value beyond your sales team, brokers, and distributors.

We often find that manufacturers invest a significant portion of their marketing dollars on sales-focused tactics or assume operators have a MUCH greater awareness of their product offerings than they actually do. Many manufacturers mistakenly believe that investing in their website is enough. However, operators' day-to-day lives are busy and full of variety. From developing menus that fit their patrons' tastes, to meeting with distributors, and making sure their operation is well-staffed and profitable, they have a lot on their plates. That means that searching manufacturers' websites isn't always at the top of their to-do list.

And while it's important to invest in your website, you need to utilize tactics to drive operators there. The right mix of strategies and tactics augments the efforts of your sales team, driving inbound traffic to your site. These can include email, social, paid search and direct email campaigns, to name a few.

It's critical to find ways to establish direct-to-operator relationships so they'll know to look to you as a solutions-provider and partner.

+ DIG IN

What tactics are you currently using to directly reach operators? Is this strategy working?

“With a lack of data, it can be challenging to build operator relationships in foodservice. But once manufacturers see the power of direct-to-operator tactics, they are blown away.”

ANITA NELSON, PRESIDENT/OWNER



#3 Utilize push/pull strategies with product launches

After months (or years!) of planning, you're finally ready to launch a ground-breaking product you're sure is going to be a huge success. So you work with your agency and create a huge ad campaign and invest in a robust media plan. The problem? Your sales team and brokers haven't yet gained distribution, leading to operator frustration and a waste of valuable dollars.





Sadly, we've seen this situation and now make sure to advise clients to take a slower "push/pull" approach to large product launches. This strategy takes a coordinated effort with your sales team but allows you to be laser-focused with media, paid search, and direct-to-operator efforts. For example, if a large distributor in the east slots your product, all media spend can be focused in that region. Geo-targeted ads ensure only operators in certain zip codes will be served that ad. This accuracy allows you to scale your campaign as you gain distribution.

+ DIG IN *How can you build more of a push/pull strategy with your future product launches to ensure success?*



#4 *Be liberal with product samples*

Even in the busiest of times, operators constantly strive to ensure they're offering their patrons the very best products on the market. So when there's an opportunity to test new menu items, they definitely will — especially if you make it easy for them.





Scan for more
in-depth insights
on sampling

Given the nature of their business, operators are hands-on learners, willing to jump in as needed, create in the kitchen, and run all aspects of their business. Sending free product samples is a sure way for them to experience your products and see how they could work on their menu.

One operator we interviewed loved a sample of a manufacturer's sauce so much that he switched distributors just to get it. He eventually went on to start a new restaurant that included 4 or 5 menu items that use the sauce. The ROI on that single sample that was dropped off by a broker rep? It's almost impossible to calculate, but it has resulted in hundreds of incremental cases since.

+ DIG IN

How successful have your past sampling efforts been? What sampling opportunities do you have in the coming year?

#5 *Enact a channel approach with relevant content*



Building long-term relationships with foodservice operators takes more than a product-centric, sales-focused approach. By nurturing the relationship through channel-specific trend- or recipe-focused content, you're demonstrating you intend to offer solutions as opposed to just moving cases.





+ DIG IN *What type of content do your customers engage with most? Do you have a strategic content calendar in place?*

Each channel has its own unique challenges, so developing content that addresses those issues demonstrates your understanding, partnership, and value. Too often, manufacturers create foodservice ads or sales materials that don't take into consideration that the needs of an independent pizzeria operator vary greatly from the demands of a K-12 foodservice director.

For example, building your K-12 content plan around creative participation-building ideas can help school foodservice professionals solve a real challenge. Or you can develop solutions for labor-strapped independent operators to utilize your product in new and easy ways.

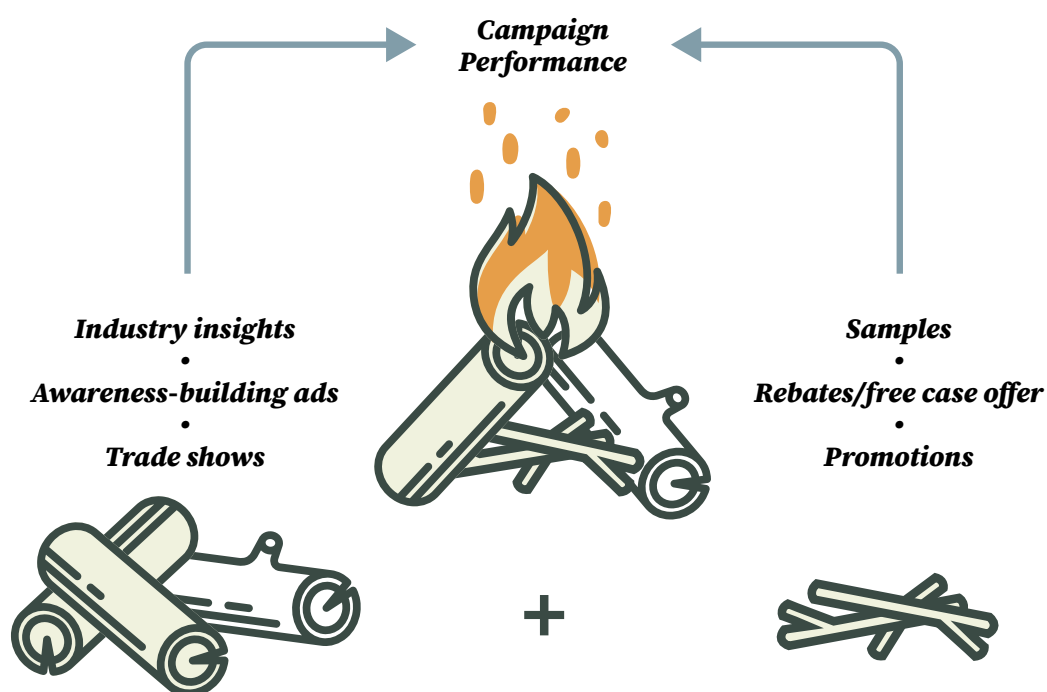
“ *B2B content marketing has such huge potential in building brands and trust. There are so many opportunities to create relatable, useful, relevant stories.* **”**

MITCHELL BRANDT, ASSOCIATE CREATIVE DIRECTOR, COPY



#6 *Leverage both “logs” and “kindling”*

The renowned marketer Seth Godin uses an analogy that resonates with us where “kindling” represents short term promotions, and “logs” are strategies that build long-term awareness. Together they create a steady fire — continued, reliable performance. And just like a long-lasting fire, we recommend clients strike the right balance of logs and kindling, otherwise a business risks constant discounts without building their brand.



+ DIG IN What logs and kindling are you using? What could you do to improve your balance?



#7 *Understand operator pain points*

It's crucial to embrace the need a product or service is truly fulfilling for operators. While an offering might check all the boxes on paper, it has the potential to flop if it's not actually solving an operator pain point. Unfortunately, we've seen products fail simply because a manufacturer didn't properly understand the unique, back-of-house challenges in foodservice. For example, one client re-launched a failed product, only to have it fail again because they didn't understand an important packaging need that was critical for operators in their back-of-house product prep.

Operators
want a
solution
— not a
product.

When it comes to this specialized industry, there is so much that goes into product selection for operators beyond taste. Taking time to conduct operator testing for feedback can pay huge dividends and creates ongoing trust.

Some questions to consider:

- *Can low-skill employees use it with ease?*
- *Does it store well on their shelves?*
- *How many menu items can it be used for?*
- *Does the package size make sense?*

“Nothing is more satisfying than strategizing and executing a successful product launch. We know how much our clients have put into the R&D and marketing efforts, and we love helping them successfully get it into the market.”

LORI GERDTS-MOENING, VICE PRESIDENT / CREATIVE DIRECTOR

+ DIG IN *What strategies could you use to better understand operators' pain points?*





#8 *Put the power of social media to work for you*

In foodservice, social media plays a pivotal role for B2B marketers. It offers unique platforms to connect with restaurant owners, chefs, suppliers, and other industry professionals. Through outlets such as Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn, foodservice marketers can share the latest culinary trends, showcase innovative ideas, and spotlight success stories of restaurants using their products. These platforms allow for visually appealing posts of food products and menu inspiration to capture decision makers' attention.

Organic social can help you create a presence but paid social offers powerful targeting tools that allow you to amplify your content to more people in your target audience.



Scan to see
5 reasons why
social media is
necessary for
foodservice
manufacturers



Beyond illuminating everything a foodservice business has to offer, social media data analytics enable marketers to pinpoint the specific needs and preferences of their target audience, tailoring their offerings to meet the demands of this dynamic industry.

Through our proprietary INgage process, we've helped foodservice manufacturers launch and build their foodservice social media presence by defining the platforms, content, voice, and overall strategy to meet their goals.

“ *It's critical to always test messaging to optimize social media performance — small tweaks can have a big impact on our goals. We love seeing what operators respond to in real time!* **”**

SAM BURNS, SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER

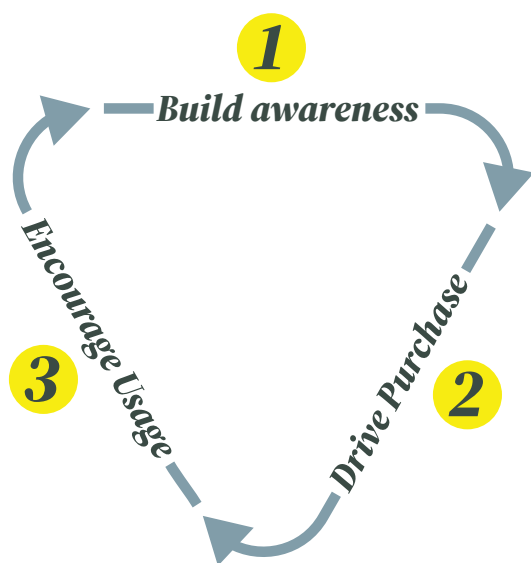
+ DIG IN *What's one thing you could do in the next three months to advance your foodservice social media presence?*

#9 *Embrace the power of repetition*

Some product launches may be in the works for years before they go to market. It's easy to fall into the trap of thinking everyone must know about this product because you marketed it for a full quarter with a robust media plan, and it was a main focus at a tradeshow (and it's practically been your whole life the past two years!). But remember: most operators need to see a message at least seven times before it sticks.



The path to purchase is not always straight.



Operators may need to sample your new product and try it before they consider purchasing it. To accommodate this longer purchase-decision period, build a communications plan that expands for at least a year. While you may go a little heavier for the first quarter or two, it's important to keep your foot on the gas using a variety of different tactics to build awareness and drive purchase over the first year. From there, you can look for opportunities to showcase usage ideas to keep the momentum going.

+ DIG IN What are some strategies that I could build into our next tradeshow to maximize the investment?

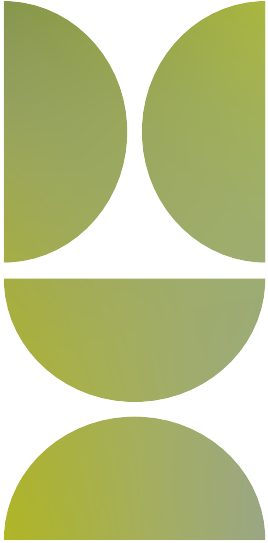


#10 *Tradeshows are back and more impactful than ever*



Considering the past few years, people are seeking opportunities for travel and real, in-person interaction. Tradeshows are a powerful way to build brand awareness, engage with operators, and capture valuable leads.





When planning your food show presence, it's crucial to recognize that you only have about three seconds to capture their attention, so less is definitely more when it comes to messaging. Pre-show communication as well as post-show follow-up help amplify and extend the goals of what you're trying to achieve.

With so many food shows around the country, be sure to look for the ones that make sense for your channel. A few to consider:

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
CONVENIENCE STORES SHOW (NACS)**

Conference: October 14 – 17, 2025

Expo: October 15 – 17, 2025

Chicago, IL

**INTERNATIONAL PIZZA EXPO
AND CONFERENCE**

March 24 – 26, 2026

Las Vegas, NV

**NATIONAL RESTAURANT
ASSOCIATION SHOW (NRA)**

May 16 – 19, 2026

Chicago, IL

**INTERNATIONAL DAIRY, DELI,
BAKERY ASSOCIATION (IDDBA)**

June 7 – 9, 2026

Orlando, FL

**SCHOOL NUTRITION
ASSOCIATION**

**ANNUAL NATIONAL
CONFERENCE (ANC)**

July 12 – 14, 2026

Charlotte, NC

**ASSOCIATION FOR HEALTHCARE
FOODSERVICE ANNUAL
CONFERENCE (AHF)**

August 20 – 22, 2026

Atlanta, GA

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY
FOOD SERVICES (NACUFS)**

2026 Date & Location TBD



5 QUICK TIPS FOR MAXIMUM VALUE FROM YOUR FOOD SHOW INVESTMENT

Plan for success

Determine what outcomes you're hoping to achieve and align your resources accordingly.

Less-is-more messaging

On average, you have only about three seconds to capture an attendee's interest. Be concise!

Be relevant

Tailor messaging to each audience. Demonstrate you understand their challenges by using channel-specific language and visuals.

Make food appetizing

Attendees can taste a lot of items at food shows, make sure they don't pass yours by.

Be approachable

Booth staff represent your brand, so choose your friendliest, most engaging team members. But don't go overboard — an over-staffed booth can be intimidating.

+ DIG IN *What are some strategies you could build into your next tradeshow to maximize the investment?*





Ready to get started?

Effective foodservice marketing is a dynamic blend of creativity, strategy, and customer-centricity. By staying attuned to the latest industry trends, engaging with your audience, optimizing your online presence, and consistently delivering exceptional solutions, you can set your business on the path to success.

We're happy to discuss how you can embrace these strategies, adapt them to your unique offerings, and ensure your foodservice establishment thrives in this ever-evolving landscape. Ready to talk? Contact us here:

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