



All's Wellness

By Barbara Ruhs



Helping Shoppers Be Healthier

Here are a few strategies for enhancing customers' nutrition in the new year.

Building sales by promoting health is low-hanging fruit — an easy opportunity for any retailer that employs a supermarket dietitian. Here are some strategies to help you get started in 2013:

Promote Produce as Much as You Can

Fresh, frozen, canned or dried — whatever the format, most folks can benefit from eating more fruits and vegetables. Demo sampling, "I'm Ripe" stickers, licensed kid-friendly characters on bins and packaging, and value-pricing fresh-cut, prepared produce for quick consumption or meal prep are simple strategies that work. Produce suppliers make it easy for retailers to do these things by offering low-cost point-of-sale materials and customized strategies to boost sales. Take it a step further by connecting deli and produce personnel in stores to add value by using ripe produce creatively in prepared meal items.

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Invest in Your Employees' Health

I've discovered that the best advocates for a customer-focused nutrition and health platform are company associates. When Bashas' introduced a nutrition tag program identifying heart-healthy, gluten-free and low-sugar products in our stores, store personnel used the tags to address personal health concerns.

Hosting health-focused events for both employees and customers can also be successful. For example, Wegmans' annual health challenges inspire employees and mobilize the entire community around fitness and increasing produce consumption, inspiring healthy habits the entire year.

Bust Myths About Healthy Foods

We're bombarded with conflicting information about nutrition and health. Fads can make it difficult to figure out what's healthy to eat and what isn't. Empower a supermarket's registered dietitian to help set the record straight. Here's a few that we need to start with:

- Stop identifying reasons for consumers to limit consumption of produce, and focus on the benefits.
- Encourage fish consumption and reduce false fears of mercury toxicity; the benefits of consuming fish outweigh any potential risks.
- Frozen produce and fish are nutritional bargains; veggie burger innovation has taken meatless to a new level that can tempt diehard meat eaters.

Make Meal Planning Easy and Budget-Friendly

Shoppers have less time and money, and are preparing more meals at home. The missing link in most stores is finding healthy solutions at value prices. Bulking up prepared meals with fruits, vegetables, whole grains and beans can boost nutrition and appeal to budget-conscious shoppers.

Offering meal plans that include weekly sale items is another easy way to improve health and sales. Creating customized meals for heart-healthy, gluten-free, sodium-sensitive or organic-focused shoppers is an easy way to attract new customers and build loyalty.

Give Pharmacy Shoppers Food Solutions

Most supermarkets could do a better job in up-selling groceries to pharmacy customers picking up prescriptions. Selling more prescription drugs isn't the answer to solving our nation's growing chronic disease statistics; in fact, drug stores are selling more groceries. Supermarkets can turn this around by investing in food and nutrition education. Dietitians and pharmacists working together can make a difference.

Use Technology to Connect with Customers

As a dietitian, I use my online presence to leverage connections with brands, media and local bloggers, promoting sweepstakes, sharing healthy recipes, publicizing in-store events, and offering timely, useful and fun facts.

Here's hoping 2013 is the healthiest year yet for your shoppers. **PG**

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