Papa John's Dishes Up Whole-Wheat Crust Pizza

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Papa John's, Fleishman-Hillard, 2009

Background Information

Since pizza is pretty much a food group in itself to college students, I decided to write my case study about Papa John’s pizza and how they were able to market their 100 percent whole-wheat pizza crust.

Founder John Schnatter built his business from the ground up. In 1983, Schnatter quit his job at a local pizza place he was working at, sold his car, purchased $1600 worth of used kitchen equipment and started delivering pizzas out of the back of his father’s tavern in Jeffersonville, Indiana. Today, Papa John’s has turned into the 3rd largest takeout and delivery pizza chain in the United States behind Pizza Hut and Domino’s (Papa John’s Pizza, 2010). In all, there are now over 3,000 Papa John’s restaurants around the world, including over 2,600 in the United States alone and 500 restaurants in 30 different countries. Papa John’s primarily sticks to carry out and delivery orders but do have restaurants that have tables and chairs for people to dine in. Their famous catch phrase, in which the company prides itself, is “*Better ingredients, Better Pizza*.” This statement gives potential consumers the idea that their ingredients are the top of the line just like their pizza.

The Problem

One of the biggest problems that concerns pizza businesses like Papa John’s and all other pizza places is the fact that pizza just isn’t that good for you. Like all fatty foods, pizza can raise your cholesterol and is a risk factor for heart disease with roughly 290 calories going into each single slice of pizza. This is one of the big reasons why some American’s do not eat pizza in the first place. However, Papa John’s had an idea. Their idea was to try and make their pizza as healthy as possible and they did just that by creating the first 100 percent whole-wheat crust. It was through this campaign that Papa John’s wanted to change the way people thought about pizza and wanted to position themselves as the healthiest pizza place on the market.

Research

Research proved that America was indeed ready for a healthier choice of pizza. Research also showed that although whole-grain foods were not the latest “fade” anymore, it still catered to a large consumer base. This research was confirmed by survey’s that took place in three test markets (primary research), which showed that the majority of people that took the survey would be all for a healthier, whole-grain option. In addition to the survey’s, Papa John’s also audited media coverage of whole-grains over a 18 month span (secondary research), identified consumer outreach platforms suitable for consumer participation (primary research), and also located an appropriate crop circle artist and location for artwork to be done for a large scale demonstration (primary research). These research techniques paved the way for the campaign.

Key Publics

Some examples of the key primary publics that were involved in this campaign were the chefs at Papa John’s who had to create the whole-grain crust, the company marketer’s who had to market the new, healthier pizza, delivery drivers for getting the pizza to the consumer, and lastly people looking for a healthier type of pizza. Some examples of key secondary publics would be the Whole Wheat Council (which could also be considered a Special Public), public schools, and also potential consumers of their new pizza.

Objectives

Some of the impact objectives Papa John’s had were to increase consumer knowledge about the benefits of whole-grains, raise awareness of Papa John’s whole-grain crust, reinforce their quality message to all of their customers, and sustain interest and maintain sales levels for Papa John’s new crust. Some output objectives of the company was to differentiate Papa John’s “better for you” option from the competition and also attract new customers with a “better for you” crust alternative. The main objective was to show the world that Papa John’s was trying to make pizza a healthier food to eat.

Programming

Papa John’s executed a lot of programming tactics during their campaign. They partnered with the Whole Grains Counsel and other notable nutritionists on product rollout, created a press kit with a natural, recyclable design and feel and mailed over 200 kits to top health and fitness magazines, top 50 dailies, and a major national television network. Since there was some confusion between whole-grain and multi-grain, the company educated reporters on the difference. Another important programming tool they used was they targeted schools and school organizations. During the past 20 years there has been a dramatic increase in obesity in the United States. In 2008, only one state (Colorado) had a prevalence of obesity less than 20% (Overweight and Obesity, 2010). Since the company had now created a healthier pizza, Papa John’s introduced it into school lunch programs.

Maybe the most notable programming technique the company used was by making a giant six-acre crop circle showing the whole-wheat crust pizza in a wheat field near the Denver International Airport. They chose this location for the crop circle because at that time, the highly-anticipated Democratic National Convention was just around the corner. Papa John’s organized with a man named Stan Herd, who happens to be the world’s most notable artist when it comes to “earthworks.” They decided that a crop circle in the middle of a wheat field would be the perfect visual to portray to potential consumers. They also posted pictures of the crop circle on their website, YouTube, and Flikr for everyone to see.

Media Usage and Grunig’s Models of Public Relations

Like most PR campaigns, Papa John’s had both controlled and uncontrolled media. Some of the controlled media the company used was their website which gave a complete consumer education guide on the health benefits of whole-wheat pizza, press kits that were mailed to different fitness magazines, and also updates on websites such as Flickr and YouTube. Some uncontrolled media that was used was interviews and food critics giving their opinion about the pizza.

This PR campaign was an example of Grunig’s two-way asymmetrical communication theory because of the fact that it was trying to focus on short-term attitude goals by showing people that Papa John’s is trying to change the greasy pizza image into the healthier pizza image. Since the company was trying to disseminate information about their new product, I would have to say that they used the Public Information model during their campaign.

Evaluation

The whole-wheat crust branding, media kit, and crop circle gained so much positive attention that the owner, John Schnatter, called it a “dead on strategy.” Pizza sales during the promotional push went up 10 percent. When it came to online ordering, the whole-wheat pizza crust pizza accounted for 20 percent of the online sales during the promotional push. Gross media impressions totaled more than 132 million and featured in 470 media outlets, such as USA Today, The New York Times, BusinessWeek, and CNN Headline News. Last and maybe most importantly, the whole-wheat crust was selected by QSR Magazine as the healthy product introduction of the year. The campaign was a success.

My Evaluation

In my opinion, Papa John’s set the bar when it comes to making fast food and delivery food healthier. Obesity is a big problem in this country and a main contributor to obesity is fast food and ordering pizzas. I think Papa John’s took the necessary first steps to get this country in better shape. I thought that their idea to use the crop circle was a very good idea due to the fact that it is not something that people see every day, and was a great promotional tool. Also, when your company wins an award for having the healthy product of the year, people are going to notice that and be more intrigued to try the pizza. All in all, the campaign was a major success.

Sources

*Overweight and Obesity*. (2008). Retrieved March 19, 2010, from <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/index.html>.

*Papa John's Pizza*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 17, 2010, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papa\_John%27s