

California Almonds Bring Big Crunch to the Research Chef Association Annual Meeting

Porter Novelli and The Almond Board of California, Jan 1, 2013

Summary: 2013 Silver Anvil Award Winner — Marketing Business-To-Business —Products

California Almonds bring crunch and flavor to countless menu items and snacks, but motivating food professionals to use almonds over other nuts in their products is a challenge. The Almond Board of California (ABC) needed to differentiate from other sponsors and prompt menu conversion at the Research Chef Association's conference. By featuring top chefs from The Cheesecake Factory and Frito-Lay in its "Building Flavors in the Kitchen" session, ABC engaged attendees and triggered menu conversion. ABC motivated 96% of session attendees to consider almonds an essential ingredient and a new chicken dish with almonds landed on The Cheesecake Factory's menu.

Marketing business to business includes programs designed to introduce new products, or promote existing products or services to a business audience.

Full Text: RESEARCH

The Almond Board of California (ABC), a non-profit organization, markets almonds on behalf of more than 6,000 growers and processors and its most important audience is food professionals. Every spring, the Research Chefs Association (RCA) brings together 1,000 chefs and food scientists who help shape the future of food research and development. ABC has three days to inspire food professionals with new ideas and influence them to use almonds in their new products.

Leading up to the 2012 conference, ABC knew that food professionals had chosen almonds as their favorite nut in an annual survey, but with a plethora of ingredients to choose from for new products, translating this affinity into action would be challenging. In the same survey, almonds' share of favorite nut to use as an ingredient in new products declined 3% points as pecans, macadamias and pistachios grew share. And, **while CPG manufacturers rated almonds as #1 for delivering taste, health and consumer demand, peanuts were the nut they used most in new product introductions.**

ABC needed to bring BIG crunch to RCA to break through the clutter. ABC engaged a trends expert and went after its top two targets in foodservice and manufacturing: The Cheesecake Factory and Frito-Lay. **Tapping the top research chefs at each company to be an integral part of ABC's presence and bringing to life flavor trends for attendees successfully led to menu conversion and relationships that would transcend RCA.**

ABC aggregated original and relevant research statistics to inform its laser-focused strategy and the development of materials. Specifically, research conducted by the Sterling Rice Group shed light on the attitudes and behaviors of food professionals and consumers as well as industry trends.

Key statistics included:

- Twenty-one percent of food professionals consider almonds their favorite nut to use an

ingredient in new products (Food Professional AAU 2011).

- Almonds' share of favorite nut declined 3% points as pecans, macadamias, and pistachios grew share.
- Almonds are reported as the favorite nut among food professionals because of their taste (70%), versatility (45%) and texture (43%) (Food Professional AAU 2011).
- Forty-four percent of food professionals consider "goes well with a variety of flavors" and "works across multiple menu items" to have the biggest impact on an ingredient's value (Food Professional AAU 2011).
- For the third consecutive year, almonds are the #1 nut used in new products worldwide (Innova, 2011).
- Consumers view almonds as the most essential/irreplaceable nut (Consumer AAU 2011.)
- Consumers perceive a dish with almonds to be "better tasting" and "more interesting." (Consumer AAU 2011).
 - Consumers have strong positive perceptions of almonds when used in common snack products (SRG, 2009 Snacking Study).

In order to differentiate ABC's demonstrations and session content, secondary research was conducted on the latest trends influencing flavor and menu development. The outcome inspired the creation of two almond recipe concepts and the entire theme of a breakout session. Recipe concepts capitalized on two trends cited in *Flavor & the Menu's* Top Ten Trends Influencing Flavor and Menu Development for 2012 ("Tacos in Transition" and "Desserts At Play"). An article in the *Wall Street Journal* about flavor pairings in snack foods, which included a quote from Frito-Lay Executive Chef Stephen Kalil about "sensorial dynamic contrasts" drove the breakout session theme and led ABC to one of its featured speakers.

PLANNING

Objectives

- Inspire research chefs with the taste, texture and versatility that almonds bring to dishes on their menus
 - Track at least one new menu item with an almond ingredient at a family casual chain restaurant
- Demonstrate how almonds can successfully deliver solutions for menu development needs and CPG products
 - Trigger an 80% relevance and motivation rating for sponsored sessions
 - Secure a minimum of 150 attendees to the general session and 55 attendees to the breakout session
 - Generate 100,000 media impressions in targeted trade outlets

Target/Audience Analysis

- **Foodservice:** Executive Chefs, Research Chefs, Marketing and General Management in upscale and family casual chain restaurants
- **CPG Manufacturers:** Research and Development, Marketing and General Management at CPG manufacturers

Strategies:

- Position California Almonds as a versatile, valuable ingredient by demonstrating on-trend foodservice and CPG almond recipe concepts
- Differentiate ABC from other conference sponsors by aligning with high-profile and credible industry experts as speakers for hosted sessions

EXECUTION

- Increased ABC's visibility at the conference with a platinum sponsorship and larger

(10x20) booth space for culinary activities, informative conversation and collateral distribution.

- Distributed pre-show postcard mailers to all registered attendees; **direct outreach to media** prior to the conference and after the event to share presentation slides, recipes and photos.
- Posted a “**visit ABC at booth #320**” reminder to the RCA online discussion group and on IFT.org member-to-member online communities; featured promo copy on Almondboard.com.
- Featured Research Chef John Csukor at the ABC booth to **showcase on-trend almond recipe concepts** that are **adaptable for foodservice and CPG** application via live cooking demonstrations (*Almond masa tortilla with beef barbacoa and almond saffron mojo; Petite chocolate almond torte with sour cherry, ghost pepper and spiced almond topping*).
- Sponsored **two sessions on the conference agenda** featuring industry experts and high-profile chefs:
 - “**2012: Menu Makers and Traffic Builders**” – General session featuring trends expert Dr. Liz Sloan explored the latest culinary trends, flavor profiles and preparation methods guaranteed to drive traffic and culinary satisfaction in today’s ever-changing, competitive landscape.
 - “**Building Flavors in the Kitchen**” – Breakout session moderated by sensory expert Gail Vance Civile (Sensory Spectrum) with Stephen Kalil (*Corporate Executive Research Chef, Frito Lay*), Bob Okura (*Corporate Executive Chef, The Cheesecake Factory*) and John Csukor (*Research Chef, KOR Food Innovation*); an interactive session that explored ingredients’ fundamental components and offered solutions for building flavors, layering textures and expanding menu options to satisfy, surprise and delight customers.
- Hosted “**Almonds & Aperitifs**” networking reception at ABC booth to promote quality conversation and build relationships while sampling innovative almond snack concepts with complementary aperitifs.

EVALUATION

Met or Exceeded Every Objective

Objective: Track at least one new menu item with an almond ingredient at a family casual chain restaurant

Result: As of August, 2012, The Cheesecake Factory introduced Moroccan Chicken (Grilled Marinated Chicken over Pearl Couscous with Asparagus, Almonds, Golden Raisins and Onions) at all 159 of its units in the U.S.; The Cheesecake Factory listed #2 for sales per unit in *Nation’s Restaurant News* Top 100 List.

Objective: Trigger an 80% relevance and motivation rating for sponsored sessions

Result:

Quantitative Survey Results

- 89% Relevance and 96% Motivation at Menu Makers/Traffic Builders.
- 91% Relevance and 90% Motivation at Building Flavors in the Kitchen.
- Attendees provided optional open-ended feedback on the survey for each sponsored session.

Qualitative Survey Results

“2012: Menu Makers & Traffic Builders”

- “Best session so far. Very clear and informative” – *Frito Lay*
- “Great presentation and awesome slides despite being jammed with data” – *Hershey*

“Building Flavors in the Kitchen”

- “It’s important for chefs to consider flavor, texture etc. and the customer might not know or understand what they are experiencing but it keeps them coming back for more” – *Kraft Foods*
- “Really liked the comparison of 2 identical products (almond items) and how just one preparation change totally altered each. Gail’s analysis really helped clarify.” – *MPH Ingredients*

Objective: Secure a minimum of 150 attendees to general session and 55 attendees to the breakout session

Result: "2012: Menu Makers & Traffic Builders" was attended by approximately 300 conference participants. "Building Flavors in the Kitchen" was attended by approximately 100 conference participants.

Objective: Generate 100,000 media impressions in targeted trade outlets.

Result: Secured 114,000 media impressions in *Food Product Design, Food Arts, Flavor & The Menu, and Culinology*.

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