



## Foodservice Marketing Insights

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We're working on a new "look and feel" for the Foodservice Marketing Insights newsletter - this issue is a first step toward what will eventually be an easier-to-read format, - I hope you like it.

Thanks for reading, and as always, let me know what you think. [Tell Dave](#)

*Dave*

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*"My main reason for adopting literature as a profession was that, as the author is never seen by his clients, he need not dress respectably." - George Bernard Shaw*

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**"No Wonder Nobody's Written This Book!"**

Last month, I took a week away from the office to put serious time into writing a book about the foodservice channel. It turned out to be a very productive way to get things going. I started, as most authors do, at Home Depot where I purchased a roll of contractor's paper. When we arrived at our destination, I rolled it out on the dining room table and started scribbling notes on Post-it's, and sticking them on the paper. In this way, I was able to organize my thoughts around manufacturers, distributors, operators, buying groups, etc., and go back and make adjustments as I worked. When I got back to the office, a friend asked me how much progress I had made on the book. I told him "about 25 feet."



(Those of you with photo-editing software can blow this up and get a sneak preview of the book....)



But my work is just beginning. We're now in the process of banging all of this into the laptop, so we can create an outline. Once that's done, I'll be sharing it with a few dozen freinds to get input and ensure that we're not missing anything.

And I don't mind telling you that writing a book IS hard work! Imagine trying to document everything you know about the foodservice business, and explaining all of the relationships and conflicts. The more I write, the more I remember what else I need to include...

So stay tuned, and thanks to all of you who have offered encouragement. I'll probably be calling on you at some point to help with final edits on specific topics, and to make sure I'm not leaving anything out. Home Depot has a lot more paper if we need it.

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### "In Defense of Food"

As a food industry veteran, I tend to dismiss popular media talk about which foods are "good for you" vs. "bad for you." I'm especially sensitive to stories that seem to paint food manufacturers or foodservice chains as uncaring, profit-first organizations who cynically foist unhealthy, chemical-laden food on an unsuspecting public.

*You probably are, too.*

In his book [In Defense of Food](#), Michael Pollan for the most part avoids this approach, presenting instead a fairly unbiased look at what he considers to be the food industry's biggest problem. It is our devotion to a philosophy Pollan calls "nutritionism."

I found the book to be a very interesting read, and suggest that others in our industry would be wise to pay attention to Pollan's message. Unlike much of the popular media, he does a good job of articulating the consumer's growing discomfort with "processed food." More importantly, he has a lot of good thinking to back up his concern about the state of the American diet, and the role the food industry plays in feeding, and perhaps shaping it. "Nutritionism" sounds like a good thing, but as Pollan defines it, it is not. Nutritionism is a mindset that says *"we should understand and engage with food and our bodies in terms of their nutritional and chemical constituents and requirements - the assumption being that this is all we need to understand."*

Pollan's problem with nutritionism is that it has replaced our traditional ways of understanding and thinking about food. He writes, *"since nutrients, as compared to foods, are invisible and therefore slightly mysterious, it falls to the scientists (and to the journalists through whom the scientists reach the public) to explain the hidden reality of foods to us."* He adds *"the sheer novelty and glamor of the Western diet, with its seventeen thousand new food products every year and the marketing power - thirty-two billion dollars a year - used to sell us those products, has overwhelmed the force of tradition and left us where we now find ourselves: **relying on science and journalism and government and marketing to help us decide what to eat.**"*

For the most part, the author avoids casting the food industry as villainous, instead pointing out that we have become what we are by doing what we do best. *"The American food system has for more than a century devoted its energies to quantity and price rather than to quality. Turning out vast quantities of so-so food sold in tremendous packages at a terrific price is what we do well."*

Personally, I reject the notion that individuals are at the mercy of food marketing and advertising, and therefore are not responsible for their own diets. But it's hard to argue with Pollan's assertion that *"today foods are processed in ways specifically designed to sell us more food by pushing our evolutionary buttons - our inborn preferences for sweetness and fat and salt. These qualities are difficult to find in nature but cheap and easy for the food scientist to deploy, with the result that processing induces us to consume much more of these ecological rarities than is good for us."* Pollan adds *"Since 1980, the price of sweeteners and added fats (most of them derived, respectively, from subsidized corn and subsidized soybeans) dropped 20 percent, while the price of fresh fruits and vegetables increased by 40 percent. It is the cheaper and less healthful of these two kinds of calories on which Americans have been gorging."*

There is no way the American food system could or should go back 50 or 100 years, but there is a sense that the pendulum is swinging away from over-engineered, over-packaged, over-marketed foods. Manufacturers who are working to eliminate items from their ingredient statements are on the right track. The growth of organic foods sales and farmer's markets speaks for itself.

If your R&D and Marketing people are not at least reading and listening to people such as Michael Pollan, you may be turning a deaf ear to a growing trend. [In Defense of Food](#) and other Michael Pollan books are available at [In Defense of Food](#).

**Final Thought:** I visit a LOT of food manufacturer headquarters offices. In reading this book, it occurred to me how few of them show evidence of being in the food business. Other than a few empty retail packages on the walls of the product managers, most of these offices look like they could belong to an insurance company. This seems especially true when the headquarters office is not attached to a plant.

Would we be more in touch if employees had visual reminders that our business is based on living, growing, natural organisms which are consumed by people????

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### "GS1 Update"

I had the opportunity recently to talk about the GS1-foodservice initiative at a distributor buying group conference. While the headquarters people are dialed into the initiative and working to understand the impact of participating (or not participating), the majority of owners were pretty much unaware of GS1. This is not too surprising, given that the founding members are actively engaged in getting themselves ramped up, and not yet as focused on "spreading the word."

But there were several stories told about large operator organizations putting the pressure on their distributor suppliers to get on board with GS1. And it's encouraging to see customers beginning to ask their suppliers to get involved. I'm not yet aware of anyone establishing a required compliance date as a condition of doing business, but it seems self-evident that this type of "gentle arm-twisting" from customer to supplier is just what is needed to get the GS1 initiative rolling full steam.

We will continue to help spread the word in support of GS1, and welcome your comments and questions.