

## Opportunities Emerge From Surge in Home Entertaining

A new "cocktail party culture," a return to backyard barbecues and birthday parties, and the growing popularity of movie, card, board game, and retro *Tupperware* party nights—some of the preceding sparked by the economic downturn—are contributing to a surge in home entertaining. For the six months ended October 2008, home entertaining was up 27%, according to Booz & Company.

Only 21% of adults say they *never entertain*, according to Mintel's 2008 *In-home Entertainment—U.S.* report. Young adults age 18–24, who have the greatest interest in gourmet and ethnic foods, are the most likely to entertain at home and to do so five or more times per month. Just over one-third (38%) of adults entertain regularly.

And nothing is too good for our guests. The National Assn. for the Specialty Food Trade reports that 36% of consumers bought specialty/gourmet foods in 2008 for a special occasion at home; 18% keep gourmet foods on hand for unexpected guests.

Two-thirds (67%) of adults would like more marinating sauces, and 62% would like more spice rubs/spice mixes, according to the Hartman Group's 2008 *Reimagining Convenience Foods Report*. With 26% of those surveyed by the Hearth, Patio & BBQ Assn. in October 2008 preferring a variety of different grilled foods (including meat, fish, and vegetables),

vegetable marinades and appetizers such as grill-ready quesadillas or mini-shrimp skewers will be in high demand.

Special events ranging from marketing meetings to book club gatherings are moving into the home. Not surprisingly, Technomic's 2008 *Parties Off-Premise* report found that one-third (33%) of adults have ordered full meals/platters for meetings, parties, and social occasions at least once a month. The party tray category is still underdeveloped. FreshLook

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Marketing Group reports that trays made up 1.9% of all deli prepared food revenues, equaling \$563 million for Y/E 9/28/08. More health foods, including veggies, hummus, chutneys, and lower-calorie spreads and dips, are important future directions for party platters. And what about more-inspired platters with baby and exotic vegetables; lower-fat and artisan cheese; and pâté and specialty imported meats? More-interesting sandwich samplers, including Cuban sandwiches, Paninis, flatbreads, and quesadillas would also be welcome.

Watch out, Chuck E. Cheese. Children's birthday parties are returning home, so why not offer unique cake kits that allow even amateurs to make eye-stopping cakes. Where are the children's

party platters, special-occasion dessert samplers to go, or party-sized kids' meals?

Cocktail occasions are coming back home, too. When entertaining guests at home, drinking alcohol is a preferred activity for about half (46%), according to Mintel. Those age 25–44 are the most likely to serve alcohol, with 62% doing so.

When consumers entertain at home, they are most likely to serve appetizers they've eaten in restaurants or at catered

motivators for consumers to do some gourmet cooking or to prepare more-elaborate meals; 24% use gourmet cooking/foods to impress a new partner, friend, or work colleague. Although Mintel classified 53% of adults as casual cooking enthusiasts and 16% as serious cooking enthusiasts, convenient, fancier foods for entertaining and foods with foolproof cooking aids are fast becoming important concepts, especially among young adults.

The time is perfect for restaurant signature and

events—frozen mozzarella sticks will no longer cut it with adventurous Gen Yers. With 27% of Gen Yers regular sushi eaters, according to Technomic, fish/seafood appetizers are a must, as are more-exotic Asian and Mexican tidbits.

Older, wealthier adults (age 50+) are the heaviest consumers of spirits and wine, gravitate to premium-quality and classic hot gourmet appetizers such as Rumaki, gourmet mushroom turnovers, and phyllo purses filled with brie cheese. For older adults, crackers made with wine, classic cocktail mixes, and dessert samplers are other strong ideas.

Mintel's 2008 *Cooking Enthusiasts—U.S.* report revealed that special occasions like birthdays and family gatherings are prime

chef-inspired foods for home entertaining. The National Restaurant Assn.'s (NRA) *Forecast* reports that 36% of family-dining restaurants, 28% of casual establishments, and 16% of fine-dining restaurants sold retail food items in 2008. More than three-quarters of quickservice and 58% of full-service restaurant operators expect to have higher catering sales in 2009, according to NRA. Finally, with Technomic reporting that 62% of consumers are purchasing more supermarket-prepared meals than a year ago, there is clearly a role for additional to-go foods for entertaining. **FT**



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