



MAKING YOUR BAKERY MORE APPEALING FOR THE HOLIDAYS

A White Paper by Unifiller Systems Inc.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 01 Introduction : Getting into the Holiday Spirit
- 02 Revamp Your Menu
- 03 It's All About Appearances
- 04 Leverage Your Online Platforms
- 05 Final Note





INTRODUCTION: GETTING INTO THE HOLIDAY SPIRIT

It's the most wonderful time of the year! Nothing quite says festive like a piping hot cup of cocoa and sweet, freshly baked treats, especially when they're shared with loved ones. People flock to bakeries during the holiday season, and in turn, bakeries must work harder to keep up with the higher demand for holiday cakes, cookies, and other seasonal desserts. The most wonderful time of the year also happens to be the busiest time of the year for bakeries.

Amidst the frenzy to pump out enough desserts to meet consumer demand, it's key to remember that today's consumers are looking for more than just an excellent product; thoughtful marketing, presentation, and service go a long way to ensuring customers get the most out of their holiday shopping experience and are more likely to drive customer loyalty and higher sales.

Let's take a look at how bakeries can be extra appealing during the holidays.



REVAMP YOUR MENU

Many bakeries in North America and Europe offer a selection of traditional desserts or a holiday-type spin on existing products during the holiday season. This is to be expected; however, extending your menu offerings to include treats from other cultures' holidays can help you reach a whole new customer segment. Doing so can also establish your bakery as one that values diversity and inclusion, a business value that more and more consumers are looking for in the brands they support, especially in North America.

Aside from the coronavirus pandemic, diversity and inclusion was a dominating topic in 2020, and incorporating multicultural product offerings is one way in which bakeries can demonstrate that they are keeping up with the social climate. Not only does it add variety to your menu, it demonstrates creativity and an open-minded business culture. Perhaps try adding sufganiyot (jelly doughnuts) and rugelach in your seasonal menu for customers who celebrate Hanukkah or treats like benne wafers for those who celebrate Kwanzaa.



THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX (OR DISPLAY CASE)

Offering special menu items like *gift baskets* are also a way to appeal to the typical holiday shopper. 'Tis the season of gift-giving, and product bundling provides a strategic opportunity to promote your seasonal menu (in-store and via online storefront if you have one) and help boost in-store sales.

Limited-time-only deals are also a great way to entice consumers to purchase something during the holiday season. People do a lot of shopping around this time of year, and special deals are an excellent way to grab their attention. Consider offering deals like “buy one seasonal item and get a second one for half price” or “purchase a gift card and get one small coffee for free”. It is a surefire way to garner consumer interest.

Continuing in the spirit of special deals, offering the option to *customize menu items* is another way to make your bakery stand out. Customers love being able to personalize their purchases, especially when buying gifts for friends and family, so providing the option of ordering desserts like custom-shaped cookies or tall cakes would make for a fun holiday shopping experience. Unifiller machines provide the perfect support for bakeries that choose this route; they can help with base icing, freeing more time for decorators to spend on customizing. Overall, they reduce the amount of labour involved with the assembling of the cakes or cookies so that more time can be directed to fulfilling the custom requests.

Get creative; offer [DIY kits](#) that customers can make with their families at home. This is an excellent product offering for the 2021 holiday season, as COVID-19 safety measures remain in effect for cities around the world.

SET UP A GIFT CARD PROGRAM

[According to Paystone, gift cards are a huge driver of holiday sales.](#) Recent surveys say that a whopping 77 percent of Canadian shoppers will buy at least one gift card this holiday season, 61 percent of people request gift cards on their wish lists, and 64 percent of people purchase gift cards for themselves. Holiday shopping can be stressful for some people, and gift cards make it easy. They are a great way to boost product sales and introduce new customers to your business; according to the Paystone statistics, “90 percent of people who receive a gift card from a small business they have never visited said they would shop at that business and return there in the future.”

Looking past the window of the holiday season, gift cards—especially digital gift cards—have been a way for people to support local small businesses affected by the pandemic. And as the pandemic drags on, many consumers avoid in-store shopping and using cash as payment out of fear of contracting the virus. [Survey data from 1,182 U.S. stores](#) show that “retailers sold 114 percent more digital gift cards in the third quarter of 2020 compared with Q3 2019”.



IT'S ALL ABOUT APPEARANCES

Having customer engagement with your establishment is a solid way to building positive customer relationships and a solid clientele; so how do you make customers want to stay a while in your bakery, instead of merely pulling the typical “grab-n-go”?

The key is to design a set-up that paints your establishment as a destination, and this involves creating a cozy, welcoming atmosphere.

Bakeries are businesses that typically rely on foot traffic. Often customers pop in and out to simply grab their baked goods, but setting out tables and chairs for in-store dining is a surefire way to encourage customers to stay and interact more with your store. Offer samples of your seasonal desserts or larger menu items to encourage purchases. Décor and music play a large role in influencing any interior space's atmosphere, so don't be afraid to pull out the decorations. Adding that extra pop of colour will help draw attention to your storefront. Put on cheery playlist of popular holiday hits; who knows, maybe customers will want to stay until the end of the song!

Above all, it's important to maintain a professional appearance. Ensure countertops and any tabletops remain clean and display cases get refilled and wiped down. A neat appearance in a food service establishment goes a long way to demonstrate a sanitary and organized environment—and important factor in regards to whether customers find your bakery appealing.

A COVID CHRISTMAS

That being said, bakeries around the world will likely have to settle for being a grab-n-go experience for the 2021 holiday season. Dine-in options are not available in many stores due to physical distancing and sanitation precautions. With these COVID-19 safety restrictions firmly in place at the year's end, many food service businesses have resorted to “order online and pick-up at the store” models or “take-out only” services to keep business running. It may not be possible to provide the ideal in-store bakery experience, but bakeries can still maintain their appeal by ensuring a professional appearance and providing excellent customer service.

Plus, they have the option of leveraging the power of digital marketing and social media to curate an exceptional virtual experience.



LEVERAGE YOUR ONLINE PLATFORMS

According to BAKE Magazine, a [2018 survey](#) conducted by Visa and “a consortium of trade associations, technology providers, banks, and researchers” found that 52 percent of consumers search online and/or check the business website before visiting a new business and over 60 percent of consumers prefer to be contacted through a digital channel such as e-mail, web [advertisements], or a business’s website. These considerable statistics show a reality that perhaps not all small businesses are willing to face: online channels are the best way to stay top-of-mind among consumers. That being said, the holiday season presents the perfect opportunity for bakeries to leverage these channels.

Promote holiday items and deals on your website and/or social media. Share photos of new holiday products and ask for customer feedback to get engagement. The trick to getting more engagement from your customer base on social media is twofold: you must post regularly and consistently and take quality photos. Keep in mind the holy trinity of [good photography](#): lighting, styling, and angles. Similar to keeping your real bakery looking professional and attractive, you want the same presentation on your website and/or social media platforms.

Send out email announcements. Unlike social media and websites, email newsletters have the ability to target specific customer segments so they offer a more personalized virtual brand experience. Bakeries can design their email newsletters to suit the holiday theme and announce new menu offerings, services, or even holiday store hours.



Hold fun virtual events like a virtual cake decorating class or an online giveaway. Online events are a great way to foster brand engagement and promote brand awareness. With so many people interacting online and staying connected via social media during the pandemic, bakeries could achieve virtual engagement with their customer base by holding events like an online bake-at-home tutorial or a cake-decorating class. You can get additional engagement by asking viewers to submit photos of their creations to enter to win a prize from your bakery. Alternatively, you can set up holiday-themed contests and giveaways on their own.

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Share a “Behind the Scenes” reel on your website or social media platforms. Maybe it’s time to get intimate this winter season and show a different side to your bakery! Giving a tour of what happens behind the scenes can be a great way to showcase to your customer base the creation process of their favourite treats. Plus, it gives you a chance to shine a spotlight on your employees’ expertise and any fancy equipment you have. Take it from the Cake Boss himself: [Buddy Valastro routinely showcases a behind-the-scenes look at his cake production](#), especially around each holiday; for Canada Day he even featured Unifiller’s own Hopper Topper and Cake-o-Matic!



FINAL NOTE

Bakeries are practically an essential service during times of celebration and holiday festivities. While year-end holidays like Christmas and New Year's Eve tend to be the most widely celebrated in most countries around the world, bakeries have other opportunities throughout the year to shine. Annual holidays like Valentine's Day, Easter, and Halloween are all events that call for sweet treats and desserts.

That being said, the holidays are definitely opportunities for bakeries to showcase their ingenuity with new products and services. It's no secret that the baking industry is extremely competitive, and nowadays in the age of social media, it's creativity and innovation that grabs the spotlight.



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