by A. Elizabeth Sloan

Label Language: What Matters to Consumers

The average supermarket carries nearly 40,000 items, according to the Food Marketing Institute (FMI), so understanding consumers' most desired new product parameters and health benefits—and communicating that on the label—is critical for success in the marketplace. Not surprisingly, the average number of benefits touted on the most successful new foods/beverages of 2012 increased to 6.2 from 4.2 a decade ago, according to IRI's April 2013 *New Product Pacesetters* report.

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Taste affected the buying decision for foods/drinks for 87% of U.S. adults last year; price influenced 73%, healthfulness 61%, convenience 53%, and sustainability 35%, with the latter down from 58% in 2011, according to the International Food Information Council's (IFIC) 2012 *Food & Health Survey.*

Two-thirds (65%) of last year's most successful new foods/beverages (IRI's Pacesetters) featured new or distinctive flavors, recipes, or combinations; 47% featured improved/authentic flavor, 23% a different texture, 15% homemade quality, and 8% a fresher taste/texture. In addition, IRI reported that chef-inspired *Pacesetters* had year one sales 17% higher than average.

With eight in 10 consumers looking for "fresh" descriptors when shopping for foods, according to Technomic's 2012 *Healthy Eating Consumer Trend Report,* it's not surprising that canned, frozen, and dry food marketers are calling out "made with fresh ingredients" on their labels.

Nearly nine in 10 consumers (87%) say that food described as "fresh" is "slightly/much more tasty." "Seasonal," "real," "made by hand," "made from scratch," and "authentic" are the top descriptors conveying fresh taste, explains Technomic.

The expiration date is the most used information on the label, read by 75% of shoppers, reports IFIC. That is followed by the Nutrition Facts Panel, read by 66%; ingredient list 51%; front-of-pack nutrition information, icon, or graphic 48%; and the brand name 46%.

One in five of last year's most successful new foods/beverages was positioned to deliver convenience benefits. Six in 10 touted easy/microwave preparation, 47% were ready-to-use/on-the-go, 37% bite-sized/handheld, 16% kid-targeted, and 5% had the serving dish included, according to IRI.

"Microwavable," "natural," "quick," "single-serving," and "upscale" are the top descriptors on frozen foods, which are eaten regularly by one in five consumers, according to the Packaged Facts 2012 *How We Eat* report.

One-quarter (27%) of the most successful new products last year offered healthier-for-you benefits. "Real/100% real" was the most cited health benefit, carried on 41% of health-driven blockbusters; "a good source of vitamins/minerals" was featured on 37%, "less calories/sugar" 33%, "more natural/organic" 30%, "a good source of protein" 30%, "fiber/whole grain" 30%, and "less/reduced/no fat" 20%, reports IRI.

Technomic reports that two-thirds (66%) of consumers looked for descriptors signaling no artificial sweeteners in 2012, 56% sought out unprocessed or local products, 52% preservative-free or hormone-free, and 40% antibiotic-free.

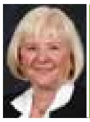
According to Packaged Facts' 2013 *Consumer Insights Study,* 66% of consumers frequently/occasionally buy foods for a specific nutritional ingredient. Technomic reports that in 2012, 75% looked for descriptors for "100% whole wheat," 66% "high fiber," 60% "a full serving of fruit," 58% "high in protein," 57% "high in calcium," 53% "antioxidants or a serving of vegetables," 46% "omega-3s," and 32% "probiotics."

Terms that convey an overall balanced approach to health (e.g., "nutritious," "healthy," and "better-for-you") are more appealing than "light" or "guiltless" descriptors, which suggest that something is missing from the food, according to Technomic data.

Just over half of all consumers (56%) frequently/occasionally buy foods/beverages that target specific health concerns, according to Packaged Facts' 2013 survey. Cholesterol-lowering tops the list of foods/drinks purchased—bought by 29% of adults, followed by weight loss/weight control 24%, blood pressure 20%, digestive health 17%, heart/circulatory health 14%, diabetes 13%, and bone/joint health 11%.

Lastly, ethical concerns continue to attract a growing number of consumers. Technomic reports that 40% of consumers look for products described as "farm-raised," 35% "cage-free," 29% "grass-fed," 28% "sustainable," and 23% "fair trade."

Dannon Oikos yogurt topped the list of IRI's top-selling new foods/drinks in 2012 with year one sales of $284 million. Rounding out the top 10 list were *Starbucks K-Cups* at $199 million, *Bud Light Platinum* $162 million, *TruMoo* milk $158 million, *Breyers Blasts!* ice cream/sherbet $147 million, *MiO* liquid flavors for water $128 million, *Sparkling Ice* flavored spring water $123 million, *Nature Valley Protein Bars* $96 million, *Orville Redenbacher's Pop Up Bowl* $92 million, and *Daily's Frozen Pouches* premixed cocktails/coolers $89 million. **FT**



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