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Diet trends reveal new demand for PR leadership

Natural is “in” and low-fat and low-carb are “out.” There’s no shortage of fads to help Americans eat healthier and lose weight, but how are these trends impacting consumer brands and food companies in 2013? According to a survey of more than 200 of the nation’s registered dietitians, a few big lifestyle trends are set to make news and influence consumer habits this year.

By Louise Pollock

We tapped our extensive network of influential dietitians to identify these developing nutrition and wellness trends. The findings revealed that natural and simple foods with few ingredients will be the big trend this year, while the low-fat and low-carb fads are on their way out.

Demand high for natural and simple

More dietitians (51%) predict that consumers will continue to demand natural and simple foods that are minimally processed with few ingredients, compared to last year’s survey (46%). And with more consumers cooking at home, they will be looking more closely at the ingredient list to evaluate the foods they serve their families. This is in line with our findings from last year, predicting that consumers will continue to demand more local, organic, sustainable, fresh, minimally processed foods. With consumers’ increased concern over processed foods that provide little nutrients, they will become more aware of where their food is coming from and what it contains. They want to make healthier food choices that will benefit the whole family.

Some key factors consumers may be

considering when making food choices include simplifying the ingredient list, sodium reduction and eliminating high fructose corn syrup. These dietary modifications will help fuel the trend toward natural, simple eating in the coming year. And according to the survey, making healthier foods delicious is the second biggest nutrition trend. While reducing sodium and sugar, consumers will look to enhance the taste and flavor of everyday meals with exotic and ethnically diverse spices and food choices.

These dietary changes are taking place because consumers want to take more control over their diets. They are better understanding that highly processed foods might pack a tasty punch, but fall flat when it comes to overall health and nutrition benefits. Also, consumers are looking for healthy foods that leave a minimal footprint on the environment, and are easy to prepare — they want to get back to the basics for a more simple, healthy lifestyle.

Half of dietitians agree that low-fat and low-carb diets are out in 2013. After reigning as the biggest diet crazes for several years, it appears that consumers are steering away from these restrictive eating regimens toward a well-balanced diet approach that focuses on better quality foods rather than eliminating an entire food group, like carbohydrates. This is good news for bread, pasta and rice lovers! Of course, the rule of thumb is everything in moderation.

Weight loss and information trends

When asked about the most popular approach to weight loss in 2013, dietitians were split down the middle, with wheat belly/gluten free (42%) beating out commercial diet programs (41%) by only one percent. While wheat belly/gluten free is predicted to be a popular weight loss trend, diet programs such as Weight Watchers and Jenny Craig will continue to see consumers turning to them for weight loss assistance in the new year. And RDs predict that social media, smart phone apps and dietitians will be the go-to sources for nutrition information in 2013.

Quality matters

The majority of dietitians (57%) surveyed say that eating high-quality calories — foods with more nutrition per bite — will be most important for achieving a healthy diet and weight in 2013. It’s not just about total calories, it’s about where those calories come from. And, hands down, dietitians agree that eating more fruits and vegetables will have the biggest impact on improving American’s diet and health in 2013 and beyond. These diet staples are packed with disease fighting nutrients, and can help consumers maintain a healthy weight when eaten as part of a balanced diet. Whether fresh or frozen, consumers will look to include more plant based foods in their natural and simple diets.

MyPlate is now our plate

Even more dietitians (76%) are using USDA’s MyPlate to counsel patients compared to last year’s survey (69%). Dietitians are finding ways to incorporate MyPlate into their practice and finding that it’s a great tool for counseling individuals on their diet.

In conclusion, I recommend that industry and media take dietitian predictions seriously when planning for 2013 and beyond. At Pollock Communications, we always seek insights of dietitians when planning branded and commodity PR campaigns, as well as retail efforts for our food clients. Dietitians keep you on the right path because they know where the science is going and what the consumers are thinking, and more importantly, consumers are listening to them — according to the Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics 2008 Nutrition and You Trends survey, 78% of consumers consider registered dietitians the most credible source of nutrition advice.

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Louise Pollock

PR Services Briefs

GLOVER PARK REPS AMC NETWORKS

Glover Park Group is representing AMC Networks, the cable programmer of high-quality, original content that is the target of takeover speculation.

Cablevision Systems completed the spin-off of AMC in 2011, though the founding Dolan family of the cable operator still controls voting rights of AMC.

AMC, which produces shows such as “Mad Men,” “The Walking Dead” and “Breaking Bad,” ranked as the nation’s No. 14th network in February, according to Nielsen. Its channels include AFC, IFC, Sundance Channel and We tv.

Bloomberg reported Feb. 14 that an AMC takeover by Comcast, News Corp., CBS or Walt Disney Co. would provide the programmer more leverage in negotiating fees with distributors.

AMC’s stock currently trades at \$58.75. The 52-range is \$61.32 and \$34.78.