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The Meat Consumer Today - *Promotion: What's New with the Consumer?*

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INTRODUCTION

Promotion has been defined as "telling and selling" the customer. The overriding goal today, however, is understanding that customer. By determining consumers' needs and desires, one can then positively position products in a creative, relevant and positive way. The meat industry is constantly seeking to gauge both consumer attitudes and, importantly, their behaviors. Both are necessary components of a sound marketing plan.

The '90s Consumer: Smart Shoppers

There are distinct differences between 1980s and 1990s consumers. Today's consumers can spot value, have slowly evolved into "cross-training families" with men and women assuming non-traditional roles, and are seeking new kinds of convenience. Moreover, our perception of convenience now evolves around efficiency, not expediency. We don't want faster microwaves. We want to eliminate tasks.

Attitude vs. Behavior

There are inherent paradoxes in analyzing consumer attitudes and behaviors. Diet books and cookbooks appear on the same bestseller lists, and women's service magazines feature a decadent chocolate cake recipe next to an article on "losing ten pounds in two weeks." The NPD Group, who has conducted several behavioral studies for the meat industry, found that there are indeed several inconsistencies between attitude and behavior. In 1985, for example, 19% of the population said they discouraged eating fried chicken; today, the figure has risen to over 40 percent. That does not, however, indicate a consumption shift: they are still not eating less fried chicken. Also, though meat consumption has been discouraged and disparaged by some, it still is the most popular protein source. The most frequently served meat is processed meat, followed by fresh beef. Chicken ranks fourth. In terms of buying behavior, then, is it safe to assume that the meat industry doesn't have to be concerned about poultry sales? Not quite. Upon closer examination of American eating habits, it becomes clear that there has been a gradual movement away from red meat products.

Although vegetarianism may not be the mainstream trend, consumers are becoming more likely to serve a variety of foods for dinner, including pastas and grains. That is the true competition.
Who Eats Meat?

Ninety-five percent of the U.S. population eats meat. Recent research has found that the meat-eating population can be broken down into four segments: those driven by taste, those driven by convenience, those driven by cost, and those driven by health concerns. Consumers expressing health concerns about meat generally fit the demographic profile of high education and socio-economic status. While some sociological experts indicate that the fitness craze is over and concerns about fat and cholesterol have peaked, consumers are still learning the importance of balance, moderation and variety.

CONCLUSION

Slipping market share is a concern of the meat industry, but must be viewed in context. After all, nearly everyone eats meat at least once in a two-week period. The goal is to turn around the consumption decline of the last decade. Is it working? The trend from 1980 to 1988 shows a decline. But the trend from 1988 to 1992 shows a maintenance. From that perspective, the efforts of the meat industry have succeeded.