

SHELF TALK

Holiday Cheese

The holidays are a great time to play up your cheese case. This year, with budgets tightening, consumers may be leaning away from having a party catered and might feel more inclined to feed their holiday guests themselves. Whether they're planning a black-tie soiree or just having a few close friends or family members over, a great cheese plate ups the ante and adds a touch of class to any holiday happening.

As a retailer looking to increase holiday sales, take advantage of the opportunity to help educate your shoppers on the sometimes-intimidating art of entertaining with cheese. There are a lot of ways to lure curious shoppers out of their shells and guide them on their way to becoming cheese connoisseurs. Whether it's in-store signage, creative displays or after-hours pairing demonstrations, there are a lot of ways to draw attention to this important holiday party pleaser.

Catch Their Eye

Because cheese needs to be stored in a very temperature-controlled setting, merchandising can seem like a challenge, but once you start thinking outside of the cheese case, merchandising can be a fun way to catch a shopper's eye.

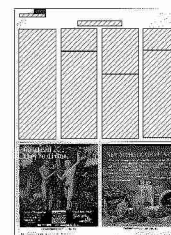
The International Dairy Deli Bakery Association (www.iddba.org) and the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board (www.wisdairy.com) both offer an abundance of resources and merchandising ideas. The IDDBA features photos from their 2008 show's popular Show & Sell section, and suggests using cracker box sculptures to get the consumer's attention. The association's examples include a 16-foot

cracker-box replica of the Golden Gate Bridge (you can see a photo of this at www.iddba.org/show-sell2.htm), but this idea has holiday potential as well, using boxes and some hot glue to create a Christmas tree or any other holiday shape. The WMMB offers a Toolbox promotion geared specifically to holiday entertaining and cooking, which allows you to work one-on-one with someone from the WMMB to design a promotion for your store that is tailored to your needs, including co-branded signage and other in-store marketing material.

Make it Easy

Once your catchy displays capture the attention of your holiday shoppers, continue to guide them by helping them create a well-rounded cheese platter. There are many ways to do this, from something as simple as posting or handing out lists of the kinds of cheeses included in well-matched cheese trays to pre-packaging trays and taking all of the guesswork out completely. For those of you who would like to brush up on mixing and matching cheeses for a platter, the WMMB suggests cheeses for themed platters, including their Traditional Wisconsin Platter: medium brick, baby Swiss, aged Cheddar, flavored Monterey Jack and Colby. The Cheeses of France Marketing Council also offers suggestions for themed cheese platters, including the Champagne Plate: Brie, Langres, ashed goat cheese and clacbitou/ripened crottin. More themed cheese plates are available at both www.wisdairy.com and www.cheesesoffrance.com.

Make it Fun



For a more hands-on approach to becoming your shoppers' primary resource for specialty cheese, explore pairings with them. And don't limit yourself just to wine — beer and cheese pairings are gaining popularity and appeal, especially with the growing consumer base of micro and specialty brews. A fun and effective way to get your customers interested in cheese pairings is to host an after-hours event that first educates attendees on how to choose cheeses and wines or beers that either complement or contrast with each other, then lets them explore and taste pairings for themselves. If you don't sell alcohol, team up with a local bar, liquor store or microbrewery and make sure that attendees come out of the event with a coupon or special offer that encourages them to return to both locations. You can also supply them with take-home resources on cheese pairings, either materials that you write up in advance, or brochures or guides you obtain from organizations like the WMMB, which has extensive educational material on its website

as well as hard-copy collateral on cheese pairings.

"The possibilities are endless for artisan cheese platters," says Marilyn Wilkinson, director of national product communications for the WMMB. "And that's why consumers are looking to try a wider variety of cheeses so that they can experiment with pairings and really have fun entertaining. Retailers who meet this demand by expanding their artisan cheese selection stand to gain a lot this winter." ©

Cheese Tips

It never hurts to remind customers of these quick tips:

- A typical cheese serving is 1-1/2 to 2 oz. per person
- Take cheese out of refrigerator 30-45 minutes before cutting and arranging them
- Select non-assertive crackers that won't mask or compete with the cheese
- Arrange cheese with seedless grapes, sliced apples, seasoned nuts and dried fruits