

Key lessons from SIAL Canada

International conference and trade show teaches universal retail lessons

By Canadian Grocer staff | April 18, 2016

Food retailers and manufacturers from around the globe came together at SIAL Canada in Montreal last week.

The three-day conference and trade show featured a range of seminars along with a trade show where close to 900 companies exhibited.

Here are some of our key takeaways:

Hone your message

Marketing a new food is tricky business. While a company might want to tout its many advantages, shoppers have short attention spans.

According to Xavier Terlet of Paris-based food industry consultancy XTC, while thousands of new foods launch every year, only half survive. Terlet said products fail not because of their quality, but because of their positioning.

“We try to say everything, but by virtue of that, we say nothing,” Terlet said. Rather than describe all the benefits of a specific product, focus on only a few key points that will make up a concise and direct marketing message.

Terlet said two out of five Canadians take the time to examine their options before picking a product, so you need to be able to cater to their tastes and make the decision easy for them.



Organic is here to stay

Sarah Dobec, publication relation and outreach co-ordinator at Toronto's Big Carrot and Thibeault Rehn, co-ordinator of Vigilance OGM, told conference attendees that organic is not simply a "trend" that will fade away.

Organic consumers, said Thibeault, are just as concerned with the health of the environment as they are with their own health.

Thibeault's organization plans to put organic at the forefront of Quebecer's minds with the launch of a new campaign on Monday in favour of mandatory labeling of GMOs in Quebec. Buying organic products is generally an easy way to identify and avoid products with genetically modified ingredients.

Don't get distracted by ecommerce

Grocery retailers looking to go online can't lose sight of the fact they're still in the business of food—not technology.

Alain Dumas, senior director of public affairs and digital strategy at Sobeys, reflected on the retailer's journey through online grocery at a conference session on ecommerce.

When asked about his biggest mistake over the past 20 years, Dumas said it was "thinking I was on a technological adventure" and trying out a bunch of gizmos to improve the customer experience. "The minute you focus more on the technology than the consumer, you're in trouble."

Dumas went on to say that the biggest value to ecommerce is everything he's learned over the past 20 years about Sobeys customers, but the key to a successful ecommerce business is having a quality product.

"You can hire someone to do marketing, and you can bring on a new tech team, but if you don't have a quality product you have nothing."