

RAISING THE BAR

While consumers haven't lost their sweet tooth, demand for healthy choices and local sourcing mean it will be essential for operators to adapt



WELOVECAKE LEMON TART

The UK officially has a sweet tooth - its bakery market is worth over £3.9bn and four in five people eat cakes and sweet baked goods, according to a Mintel report last year. Pre-pandemic, the sweet baked goods industry was thriving, with 34% of Craft Bakers Association (CBA) members saying in 2020 that sales of the products had grown in the past year and one in five revealing they made up as much as 40% of weekly sales.

After all, while food trends come and go, the temptation of a sweet treat is hard to shake. But consumer demand is evolving, with a gradual shift having been accelerated by the pandemic and several studies finding people are keen to lead a healthier lifestyle post-Covid. Rather than being bad news for the sector, though, there are plenty of opportunities to explore.

At Two Magpies Bakery, which began in Southwold but has now expanded to seven cafés around Norfolk and Suffolk, co-owner Steve Magnall says demand for their free-from ranges has grown considerably. Their amaretti biscuit (made with aquafaba, chickpea brine) has been a particular hit with people on all diets. "You will always have people who want a treat, who come out after a cake or a pastry, but our vegan range and our gluten-free range have definitely increased and that is led by demand," he says. "We have been increasing vegan products across the piste.

"We often get people writing to us to say can you increase your range. The days of people saying 'I'm not eating that because it's vegan' are gone. People are more accepting of vegan and gluten-free dishes."

Creating indulgent, attractive cakes which are both better for consumers and the planet, will be key in the coming year, agrees Jacqui Passmore, marketing manager UK and Ireland for Dawn Foods. "Concerns about sugar reduction, and eating less fat and more protein, as well as interest in foods' immune-boosting credentials, mean that today's consumers are more aware than ever about what goes into the products they choose," she explains. "Legislation like high fat, salt and sugar and Natasha's Law mean issues such as sugar and allergens are also much more front of mind for both the industry and end consumer."

In the autumn, Dawn introduced a Super Bakery range, tapping into the demand for superfoods including grains and berries. It boasts a whole and ancient grains cake mix, which can be used in products such as muffins, loaf cakes, cookies and cake bars.

Karen Dear, director of operations for the CBA, agrees that after feeling vulnerable during the pandemic,

" Consumers still want to treat themselves but are also seeking out healthier alternatives "

consumers are making a bigger effort to improve their wellbeing. "Bakers should take this into account when considering their muffin and cookie offerings," she says. "From high fibre and wholemeal options to healthy inclusions such as nuts and seeds, there are a multitude of ways to increase not only the nutritional quality of products, but the variety, texture and taste too."



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“Telling the story behind your food is a great way to engage your customers”

She points to Mintel research from 2020, which found that 25% of young British millennials and 12% of all Brits said Covid-19 had made a vegan diet more appealing - but a balancing act appears to be key, with consumers still turning to operators for a treat. Warings Bakery, a CBA member in Berkshire, says it has achieved little success with healthier products and finds that customers still come through its doors for a slice of indulgence.

There is plenty of potential in the sweet treats channel, according to Rebecca Dunning, trade marketing manager for La Lorraine Bakery Group, and it is an area the group is focusing on. She agrees that it is key for operators to strike a balance between products that both taste good and deliver in the health stakes. “Consumers still want to treat themselves, but at the same time they are also seeking out healthier alternatives,” she says. “Our key focus is to ensure that all of our indulgences are worth it, making sure ingredients are of the highest quality, creating products that are delicious in taste and totally rich in flavour.

“Health and indulgence are two thriving markets at the moment, and they are both key sectors that we are

tapping into. We have a fantastic sweet treat range that is well suited for all-day operators and, as the demand for healthier options continues, we will carry on satisfying these needs.”

She points to its Donut Worry Be Happy brand as an example. Its dough is 20% lighter than its rivals, with individual doughnuts containing on average 18% less fat than its competitors.

Last year, the free-from sweet bakery market alone was worth around £35m across the major multiples, according to We Love Cake, which reformulated many

of its recipes in 2019 in an effort to reduce sugar. It says operators should consider buying pre-packaged cakes and bakes made in free-from bakeries, which can offer consumer and owner peace of mind.

“Ensuring you provide a free-from offering can help sales increase,” it says. “Those who are with someone who has an allergy, intolerance or dietary preference are more likely to be guided to their choice of food outlet by the requirements of that person, so helping meet their needs can encourage greater footfall.”



CALLEBAUT VEGAN BAKED DOUGHNUTS - MATT MADDEN PHOTOGRAPHY

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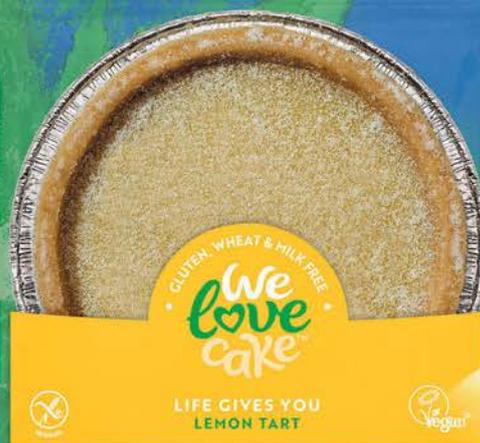
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“ The twists on nostalgic bakes will be more popular than ever ”

Adding plant-based alternatives to your menu is not just likely to appeal to vegans - while roughly 3% of the population are believed

to follow such a diet, the Callebaut Dessert Report from 2020 found 15% of consumers would be more likely to order a dessert if it was plant-based. The Vegan Society says the number of vegans in the UK has quadrupled to 600,000 since 2014. “This showcases that these inclusive dishes can appeal to the majority of diners and caterers can meet the requirements of the majority of their customers with one recipe,” Anna Sentance, gourmet marketing manager for Callebaut UK and Ireland, says.

“However, while inclusivity is crucial for caterers, consumers tend to opt for desserts at more indulgent occasions, with 54% indicating that they would choose one for a special occasion. Ensuring that inclusive desserts remain indulgent is crucial for caterers in order to maximise profits.”

But it’s not only what goes into products that consumers are more aware of - it’s also where they come from. A focus on provenance and buying local has spread from the student market into the wider public and will need to be factored into operators’ decision-making this year.

“Consumers are increasingly looking for handmade, artisan products with real provenance,” Dear says. “Highlighting if products have been made on-site by a member of the team or using locally grown or sourced ingredients are all ways to drive customer interest, so be sure to do this on menus, online and face-to-face. Telling the story behind your food is a great way to engage your customers and can be shared on your social channels too.”

Most operators will know the value of promotions - but timing could be key. A pastry with a coffee on the way to work, a cake for the afternoon slump, or a dessert to enjoy after dinner - there are plenty of times when consumers are looking for a sweet treat, and the return to offices in 2022 brings plenty of opportunity. Magnall says its Norwich branch, its most dependent on office workers, is now beginning to return to pre-pandemic levels.

PANESCO MORNING GOODS

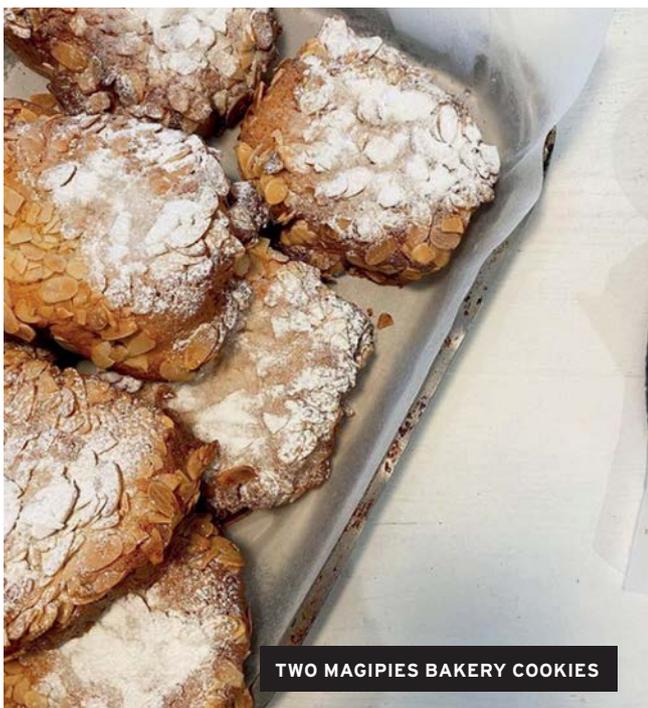


DAWN FOODS BAKLAVA SOURDOUGH DOUGHNUTS





TWO MAGIES BAKERY VEGAN CHOCOLATE AND SEA SALT COOKIES



TWO MAGIPIES BAKERY COOKIES

Operators shouldn't assume, though, that consumers only eat breakfast in the 7am to 9am slot. Callebaut's report found that 52% of consumers in cafés and coffee shops buy a sweet treat alongside their coffee mid-morning, with the company's chocolate chip shortbread and hot cross muffins proving popular when marketed alongside a coffee earlier in the day.

And Zareen Deboo, foodservice channel operations manager for Ferrero UK and Ireland, says Ferrero and Toluna research from 2019 showed that when it came to a mid-morning snack, muffins (29%) and sweet pastries (27%) were top options. She adds: "These classics will always be best-sellers, but introducing something different to the menu could prove popular."

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TOP TRENDS

Operators looking to refresh their menus could look to well-known brands. Particularly popular are those that evoke a sense of nostalgia, limited-edition specials and attractive bakes that work on social media.

In the CBA's member survey, 33% said doughnuts topped the sales charts, backing up Kantar research that put the at-home consumption doughnut market at £103m, up 47% over the past five years. At Warnings, doughnuts make up 7.5% of annual sales and perform well both mid-morning and in the afternoon during the school run.

In comparison, muffins account for 1%. Promotional and seasonal varieties have been key in driving sales there, with the team using popular brands such as Biscoff, Aero, Cadbury's and Kinder Bueno, among others.

Using well-known names offers quality reassurance, says Deboo, with the company's research showing six out of 10 customers would be more likely to choose a product if a brand such as Nutella was used. "Without overhauling your offering, brands can help caterers refresh their bakery items, justify



NKC WELOVECAKE ALMOND TART

higher prices and generate greater profit margins," she says. "In fact, 84% of consumers would pay up to a pound more for Nutella-inspired bakery items."

Passmore agrees that additions to existing products will be key, saying: "Twists on nostalgic bakes will be more

popular than ever. Products that will pique the consumer's interest will have an element of innovative flavour and texture. One example is the increasing popularity of blondie chocolate - a combination of caramel and white chocolate - paired with exotic fruit, and even more Asian spices and fruits paired with traditional local sweet treats."

Donut Worry Be Happy has also seen success with bite-sized desserts, which it says is likely to be a trend this year. Its Bites range offers six mini-doughnuts, available in a range of flavours, while La Lorraine's Panesco sells an assortment of mini-Macarons de Paris.

Whether it is a case of investing in superfoods, launching health-conscious bakes or trialling limited-edition flavours, innovation will be key for operators looking to stand out this year. ☪



HOT CROSS MUFFIN CALLEBAUT - MATT MADDEN PHOTOGRAPHY

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