

Think outside the bakery box

by Marilyn Odesser-Torpey,
contributing editor



■ *Yummy Cupcakes removed cupcakes' ubiquitous liners and began offering Cupcakes in a Jar™, cake and icing layered in a glass jar.*

Packaging can make the difference between a sale gained and a sale lost. Unique or eco-friendly containers can pique interest and increase sales.

How do you turn a simple cupcake into a coveted gift? How do you make sure a bread buyer can tell the white from the whole wheat without a second glance? And how can you go green without putting your business in the red? For a growing number of retail and specialty wholesale bakeries, re-designed packaging is the answer.

Yummy Cupcakes, with stores in Burbank and Santa Monica, Calif., has taken its eponymous edibles not only outside the box, but also outside the

traditional paper cup.

The company's Cupcake in a Jar™, which consists of layers of cupcakes, icing, fillings and toppings in a mason jar, has been a huge success since the bakery introduced the product

in March 2006, according to Executive Chef Tiffini Soforenko.

"They became so popular that we now carry them in our bakeshops every day," she says.

Yummy Cupcakes keeps a handful of flavor combinations on each stores' front counter as visual samples and to encourage impulse purchases. The bakery's pastry chef also will make them to order. The jars are available in single (\$5.25), double (\$8.50) and family (\$11.50) sizes.

Another popular signature item is the Cupcake on a Stick™ (\$5.50), a candy apple-looking creation that is double-dipped in chocolate, rolled in a variety of toppings and packaged in recyclable

■ *Market of Choice has gone green with its packaging, including paper baking moulds and corn-based plastic clamshells.*



grab-and-go bags or fancy boxes with a bow for gift-giving. Cupcake Truffles™—half dollar-sized white and chocolate cupcakes dipped in chocolate or buttercream icing and rolled in nuts, sprinkles or candy—are packaged six to a small kraft box to resemble their candy counterparts (\$9.50).

Jami Curl, owner of Saint Cupcake, with two stores in Portland, Ore., invested less than \$10,000 to design and produce a box with special die-cut inserts for a recently introduced Cupcake Shop do-it-yourself kit. The box has cut-out nests for three (\$10), six (\$17.50) or 12 (\$35) wrapped cupcakes of the customers' choosing and lidded corn-based condiment cups of icing. The kit also includes heat-sealed packets of sprinkles and other toppings and wooden icing spreaders. Candles and cupcake picks are optional additions. The kits may be ordered from Saint Cupcake's website and in its stores. Curl estimates that in an average week, the company sells at least 400 of the kits.

In its three New York locations, Magnolia Bakery captures grab-and-go gifters by offering a dozen vanilla and chocolate buttercream-iced mini cupcakes in colorful egg carton-like containers. Available in pink, green and blue cartons tied with a tulle bow, the cupcakes—positioned as a thank you

gift—are priced at \$20, \$2 more than the same number of minis without the fanciful presentation.

Easy identifiers

With more than two dozen product SKUs, New Haven, Conn.-based Chabaso Bakery, a specialty wholesale artisan bread bakery, wanted to find a way to create packaging that would help shoppers instantly indentify flavors, provide visual continuity for new products and reinforce the bakery's already strong brand identity. Early last year, Chabaso introduced the first packaging redesign in its 14-year history, and while not a drastic departure from the original, the new look is definitely distinctive, says Dorothy Radlicz, director of marketing.

"Based on our consumer research, we knew that we had some very strong brand equity in our brown bag, company name, logo and overall packaging appearance," she says.

To retain that brand equity, Chabaso kept its basic brown kraft bag, which Radlicz describes as a reflection of the company's down-to-earth philosophy, but has amped up the graphics with ribbon-like bands color-coded to each bread variety as well as whimsical, flavor-specific illustrations. For example, the Rainin' Grains ciabatta bag sports a blue flavor ribbon and an

illustration of grains raining onto open umbrellas; the roasted garlic ciabatta's ribbon is red, as is the illustration of the featured ingredient.

"If there are eight different Chabaso breads lined up on a store shelf, the consumer would be able to identify the one they want with one glance," Radlicz says. "The colors also alert consumers that there are other varieties of our breads that they might want to try."

The company did not have to make a large investment to get more bang for its bag. Aside from the initial outlay for tweaking the original design, the only extra cost was for adding an additional color, Radlicz says. To further reinforce the color connection, Chabaso also offers retailers color-coded clip-on shelf-talkers.

In response to coffee shop, deli and specialty store retailers' requests for grab-and-go-packaged versions of some of The Graceful Cookie's best-selling sweets, the Vallejo, Calif.-based company responded a few months ago by introducing two-packs of its chocolate-dipped tea cake cookies and single packs of its biscotti and Flutter butterfly shortbread cookie in January.

"We had at least 100 retailers express interest right away," says co-owner William Lenker. "They really like the fact that the packs can be

displayed in a variety of different attractive display formats, such as baskets and cookie jars, and are totally sanitary as well as convenient.”

The heat-sealed packets also increase product shelf life by more than two weeks without the need to add preservatives. Profit margins are virtually unaffected because the new packaging adds only a nickel to the product prices, Lenker notes.

Green is way of the future

Three years ago, Market of Choice, which operates seven supermarkets in Oregon, replaced many of its metal baking pans with biodegradable paper baking moulds that also serve as a final packaging component.

“By eliminating the metal pans, we have been able to reduce our energy output because we can bake our desserts at lower temperatures and we have fewer pans to wash, which also saves water,” says Market of Choice bakery sales manager, Christina Jessie. “Best of all, our packaging isn’t generating trash that will sit in a landfill forever.”

Jessie was impressed with the moulds when she first saw them in some small European bakeries.

“We use mostly espresso brown and some black moulds; when they’re slipped into a cellophane bag, they are gorgeous, very European-looking,” she explains. “Plus the moulds help the products inside to hold their shape.”

Market of Choice did not need to raise product prices. The cost of the moulds has actually gone down since the chain began using them.

While the disposable moulds have not required the company to adjust its product formulas, staffers initially did have to show customers how to use the attached ring tab to remove them.

“The tabs are really easy to use once you know how,” Jessie explains. “Our customers caught on quickly.”

For cookies, muffins and other products that are not appropriate for the moulds, Market of Choice uses corn-based plastic clamshells. To let ecology-

conscious customers know about the green packaging, Market of Choice has posted the information in the bakeries and on the company’s website.

When it comes to being earth-friendly, Pattycake Bakery in Columbus, Ohio has gone to great lengths to devise

were made with chemicals.”

Instead of a traditional style of label that has to be affixed directly on the cellophane, the company uses a specially designed paper band that wraps around the product. The band is closed around the back with a couple



■ Pattycake Bakery’s labels, which wrap around the products, are made from 100 percent post-consumer recycled paper and bonded with wheat-based glue.

packaging that is, as owner Jennie Scheinbach describes it, “the greenest we’ve seen anywhere.” Every part of the packaging is 100 percent biodegradable, down to the wheat-based vegan glue used to attach the labels.

It took almost a year to develop the new packaging, which is made from a plant-based material that is even more biodegradable than cellophane, and the 100 percent post-consumer recycled paper labels are printed with soy-based inks. Scheinbach was able to source the bags, labels and inks in the Columbus area. However, the glue, which could not be sourced locally, comes from a manufacturer in Baltimore. The wheat paste glue comes in powder form and can be mixed as needed.

“Many regular adhesives, including all-natural ones, are made with animal products, which didn’t fit with our vegan operation,” Scheinbach says. “And the other vegan glues we found

of dabs of glue. Folding all of the labels by hand and applying the glue with paintbrushes has added about seven or eight seconds to the process of wrapping each item.

The new packaging also is more expensive, requiring Pattycake to raise prices by about 5 percent to cover the increased costs. But customer response has been universally positive, Scheinbach says.

“We sent out a letter focusing on the positive, how the packaging was better for the environment, and how it is in keeping with our values,” she explains. “We think we’re seeing even more business as people who share our values find out about us.

“We are even getting inquiries from big companies that want to explore the possibilities of carrying our products,” she adds. “And we think at least part of the reason is our commitment to being green.” **MB**