

Target Practice



How the right special event planning can score you a direct hit

by Andrew Potter

A holiday party; a big playoff game between rival teams; a concert featuring chart-topping acts. All of these special events can require additional staff, more-than-usual food and beverage on hand, and the ability to adjust to an influx of customers. With this in mind, special events can be a headache to many concessionaires.

In spite of these added pressures, proper planning and execution can open up a wealth of opportunities for concession sales. Special events can also serve as a training ground to break in new or unusual products and see if they can hold their own. Concessionaires also have the oppor-

tunity to display creativity in packaging and presentation of food and beverage during these events.

Set your sights

In planning for special events, NAC Director of Education Shelley Feldman suggests that concession operators go through a checklist of all things involved in regular events from start to finish. Adjust that list depending on the increase of expected attendance or change in demographic of the crowd.

Operators may simply increase food and beverage and overlook the need for everything else that goes into handling an event such as

increased cash control, extra security, excess trash handling, extra tables or increased paperwork.

Aim for the right sales mix

Anticipating food and beverage supplies for a specific event starts with figuring an anticipated per capita. This may mean using a similar event plan or soliciting advice from a peer in the industry.

After finding a potential per cap number, multiply the per cap number by the expected attendance at your event to figure out your total expected food and beverage sales. Take the total sales and divide up your menu according to your sales mix, or

percentage you typically sell of each item. Divide the total dollar amount by the item price and you have the quantity you should have on hand, although Feldman suggests tacking on 10 percent more to this number just to be safe. (see chart on page 21)

Hone in on the Target

Often when there are groups of people attending a special event, a good deal of those could be children.

Kelly Kroneberg, CCM, foodservice coordinator at Waukesha County Park System in Waukesha, WI, explained that catering to kids brings opportunities to be creative and introduce different types of products in unique ways, especially during special events. "For our 2003 Halloween event, we will be naming or packaging each of the products after Halloween related items," she said. "For example, licorice ropes will be called licorice veins, and popcorn will be going into plastic gloves to look like skeleton hands."

Special events also open up opportunities to introduce new products to adults as well. Centering concessions around the theme of the actual event can help introduce unique products.

"Since we are a nature-based operation, food for our autumn festival tends to revolve around nature-based products," Kroneberg said. "For example, we sell buffalo burgers, dill pickles on a stick, and apple pies and cider. Attendees seem to like having original products that are not typically seen at an ordinary festival."

Waukesha County Park System also found a creative and successful way to sell combo meals during these events. "Another great selling tactic that we used last year at our beach concessions is selling a meal deal such as a hot dog, chips, soda, and mini candy bar in a sand pail with the our park logo with a shovel. The kids loved the idea and we sold through the whole batch of pails well before the season was over."

NAC Regional Vice President Alvin Shandro, president of Western



The calm before the storm (above) as Western Food Services employees prepare to serve beer to U2 concertgoers at Commonwealth Stadium in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. The storm hits as fans engulf the beer truck. Western Food Services drained 160 kegs of beer on the field level alone serving fans for two nights of the concert.

Food Services in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, provides food and beverage at football and baseball stadiums, a golf course, and a hockey arena, and also handles special events like concerts and festivals.

He explained the ability to be flexible with your points of sale is key to pulling off the promotion of new products during special events. "Portable locations are crucial during special events. Special items are usually sold such as fresh squeezed lemonade and fresh fruit," Shandro said.

Being creative might also have

to do with changing your concession sales from the traditional "belly-up" or bank line to a cafeteria line or even a buffet.

This is a partial version of the complete story that appeared in the Spring 2003 issue of Concession Profession, the magazine for NAC members. [To become a member of NAC click here.](#) Members that would like to receive the complete story can call the NAC office at (312) 236-3858.