

PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGY CASE STUDY

THE TABASCO® BRAND HOTTEST CHEF CONTEST

Goals and Objectives

With a product like TABASCO® brand Pepper Sauce, consumption is the name of the game when it comes to promoting sales and boosting bottom line profits. The TABASCO® Brand Hottest Chef Contest™ was devised to do just that as a vehicle to spark added excitement for the Brand within the culinary world. More specifically, the contest was engineered to educate independent and chain restaurant operators and culinary students nationwide and throughout Canada on how to use the world-famous pepper sauce and the other five members of the TABASCO® Family of Flavors pepper sauces in their menus for every part of the menu -- from breakfast to drinks — and even dessert!



Research, Methodology and Description

Sampling research with the TABASCO® Family of Flavors conducted in grocery stores and at trade shows nationwide over the last several years, as well as recorded inquiries from foodservice operators and chefs to the 1-800-HOT-DASH hotline, has shown that key audiences have a need for menu development ideas and recipes, and that they would get excited about each of the Family of Flavors if they knew how to use them in dishes. As a solid fit for the continuing “bold and flavorful” trend so popular in the foodservice industry today, the TABASCO® product line-up was touted via a strategic integrated marketing communications program as “not just for gumbo anymore” to a variety of vested interest audiences. A number of promotional and communications vehicles were utilized with targeted messaging promoting unique, fun and on-trend uses for all six TABASCO® flavors, including the following:

- direct mail
- internet marketing on TABASCOfoodservice.com
- targeted email blasts
- trade magazine and product case inserts
- national trade advertising
- national trade show PR
- culinary school bulletins and classrooms
- culinary school alumni publications and mailings
- advertorial and editorial coverage in foodservice trade publications

In addition, a “call for entries” news release was distributed to key food and beverage trade media about the contest theme, available prizes, the prestigious judging panel and contest rules and directing contestants to the website for more information. A second news release announcing the winners and the winning recipes was created and distributed to key trade media.

Research was conducted to determine a premium cash award level to attract maximum and top-quality entries.

Because analysis of website “hits” to TABASCOfoodservice.com showed a rapidly growing number of chefs were utilizing the internet to access the expansive TABASCO® foodservice recipe database located there, downloadable on-line entry forms were created at TABASCOfoodservice.com with instructions on how to enter and send required photographs of competing dishes.

Industry association mailing lists were purchased and brochures direct mailed to chefs, operators, and chefs-in-training promoting the contest and encouraging entries with unique, fun uses for all six TABASCO® flavors following a “Splash into the Mediterranean” theme.

All national and international entries were pre-qualified by our PR team to ensure all rules were followed and requirements met before they were qualified for a second time with a panel of culinary experts in New York City. The top professional and student finalists were chosen and included in the final judging in New Orleans, home of one of McIlhenny Company’s corporate office locations, by President and CEO Paul McIlhenny and a number of “movers and shakers” in the chef world who own and operate restaurants there. The winner of the top professional category prize was awarded \$10,000 and merchandise; the student category winner was awarded \$2,500 and merchandise.

Results

The results of the contest, including winners, winning recipes, text and photos highlighting the contest proceedings were posted on the TABASCOfoodservice.com website and announced in a news release distributed to key food and beverage trade media in the U.S. and Canada. Publicity results are highlighted below in the “Measurement” section.

The growing numbers of entries over the years since the inception of the TABASCO® Brand Hottest Chef Contest™ in 1999 has spurred the creation of a series of branded “Hottest” contests pitting the best of the best in their respective food and beverage fields

against each other to take home the top prize of \$10,000. The newest addition to the contest series targets bartenders and mixologists to take part in the TABASCO® Brand Hottest Bartender Contest™, featuring a judging panel of the world’s premier mixologists, Francesco LaFranconi and Tony Abou-Ganim.

Measurement

Media coverage garnered for the TABASCO® Brand Hottest Chef Contest™ by our PR team, totals \$291,350 in editorial value with 1,965,466 total impressions.

Equally as importantly, the contest has won praise from foodservice publications and at trade shows as an innovative way for a little company with a big brand to increase use of its product.