

Secondary school canteens - marketing

Canteen fact sheet

Unlike cafes and restaurants, school canteens have a limited customer base. This means you need to maximise all marketing opportunities and ensure they are appropriate for your customers. In this case, young people or teenagers.

The aim of this fact sheet is to provide you with background information about what appeals to young people and how you can implement this in the canteen.

Social media tips

Students are more tech-savvy than ever, which means you have to meet them where they live—online! Choose social media platforms already used by your customers; students are more likely to use Snapchat and Instagram than Facebook, so make sure you're adept at using the apps your students like.

Tips for providing content:

- Use a positive, friendly and upbeat tone of voice
- Use everyday language, be succinct
- Aim to post on a regular basis, at least 2-3 times per week
- Use images, not just text
 - Images could be photos direct from the canteen e.g. take photos of freshly prepared food or new products
 - Create interesting graphics using design programs such as Canva (free subscription available)
 - The Healthy Kids Association website has a library of images of suitable canteen food that you can access for free e.g. pita pockets, smoothies, healthy burgers and jacket potatoes
- Use hashtags on posts
- Use strategies that require an action e.g. tagging, commenting, sharing
- Provide links to further information where required
- Use content such as jokes, humour or lifehacks
- Share real-life stories that are relatable to your followers to increase your perceived authenticity and trustworthiness and generate a greater persuasive capacity
- Use credible sources, show your credentials and be authentic
- Investigate the best time to post, consider if students are more likely to look at their social media first thing in the morning before school or after school.



Each month review available data from the platform to see what type of content worked best. For example, which posts received the highest number of 'likes' or comments. Focus your future posts on similar content or designs.



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Make it relevant

Young adults beliefs and attitudes towards food and health are often related to concepts of good/bad/guilt; we need to shift our marketing approach to engage young adults by using a positive tone.

We need to learn the language of the group we're targeting to understand what's important to them and find messages that can motivate and inspire them to choose healthy food and drinks.

Part of this means finding solutions to issues young people face.

Health and nutrition

Ensure easy access to healthy options and understand competing demands and priorities that influence healthy choices. For example:

- Young adults may choose a food because it's seen as the quickest option to buy and/or eat on the move. Picture your canteen counter, make sure there are healthy choices ready to grab and go, such as soup in a cup. Whilst a large soup warmer on the counter may work in some canteens, it could be seen as a barrier for customers as it takes time to scoop out a serve
- If you offer over the counter and pre-order service, ensure collecting pre-ordered items is quick and seamless i.e. separate line/window; clearly labelled orders; consider offering an incentive for pre-ordered items; have a bowl of whole fruit available for students to choose from when they pre-order and collect items.

Finances

Younger teens 12-13 years earned an average of \$31 a week, while older teens at 14-15 years earned \$77 a week. The majority of students in high school who have jobs state their motivation is less about saving up for something or helping with family expenses and more about earning every-day spending money – such as purchasing items from the canteen . This means students want value for money.

- Offer combos whereby the combined price (e.g. \$6.00) for a burger (\$5) and a fruit salad (\$2) is less than the items purchased individually
- Frequent customer cards e.g. for every four cheesies purchased the fifth is free.

The Environment

In schools, students are becoming keenly aware of the challenges we are facing due to society's dependence on disposability and convenience. Ask students how they think the canteen could be more sustainable. Students are more likely to get on board with the canteen if they know you share their concerns. Advertise the strategies you have implemented e.g.

- Removing all plastic straws from the canteen
- Replacing single-use packaging with compostable materials such as cardboard or bamboo
- Using seasonal locally grown produce; less food miles and is of higher quality as it has not been in storage for months.



Engage and respond

The first step in increasing student engagement is making sure they know who to talk to about the canteen, as well as encouraging them to do so. Don't just ask students what you want to know, ask them what they want you to know e.g. about food, customer service, the lunch line experience, canteen décor etc.

- Create student panels to taste test new menu items, hold naming contests for new dishes, or have a school-wide canteen meme contest to kick off a new PR campaign
- Use a suggestion box
- Provide questionnaires e.g. an online survey using a platform such as survey monkey
- Use social media to do a poll about a new product.



Dealing with negative feedback may be uncomfortable but it provides another opportunity to create dialogue and engage directly with someone who uses the canteen and took the time to provide feedback.

Practice responses with statements; for example: If a student says 'I don't like the canteen!' ask them to 'be more specific and constructive, and tell you examples of what they would like to see on the menu instead.'

Students want to feel like someone is listening. Saying 'thank you' is just the first step! Students want to know how their feedback made a difference, so be specific and share how their comments, questions, and concerns affected change in the canteen.



Case studies

York District High School - Verity White, Canteen Supervisor

- Targeted items
 - Many Secondary school students don't have breakfast so having items available at recess such as a toastie, or a little cheesy, really appeals to them. I provide items that are bread based and cover a number of food groups. This could be a home-made pizza slice with vegetables or a wrap with breakfast type items. I also price these up to \$5.00 as most students have their own money from part time work
- Marketing
 - I market items that are familiar to students from takeaway restaurants such as a KFC type wrap (crumbed chicken & salad or marinated chicken & salad) and McDonalds style breakfast muffins. I know secondary students have access to funds so price these items a little higher
- Rebranding
 - The students recognise the canteen as a 'city cafe' after it was externally upgraded, visually it is much more appealing to teens
- Visual appeal
 - The offering needs to appeal, the older children appreciate a display which is both plentiful and varied and as adults they 'eat with their eyes' so if it looks exciting they will buy it as opposed to the younger students who just want to buy something for 50 cents and tend to ask if they don't see what they want.



Applecross Senior High School - Cre Millar, Canteen Supervisor

- Times have changed
 - Don't assume today's teenagers eat what you ate at the same age. Times and tastes have changed and broadened. Vegetables are welcomed as long as the end product is tasty and most students have a broad palette, taking in many cuisines
- Try and try again
 - Test a new item for at least one whole term before you decide to keep it or not. It takes weeks for most people to try any new item
- Positivity is infectious
 - Whether dealing with volunteers, teenagers, staff or school principals it is much easier to keep smiling and take the high road than to rebuild a burnt bridge
- Attitude is everything
 - People are willing to support and be around someone who is fun and friendly. This attitude brings volunteers and customers when you really need it
- Price, price, price
 - It is vital that you learn how to cost out and price menus properly. Take the time to talk to your suppliers and get yourself better wholesale prices. It is absolutely vital for survival for any canteen but especially in a high school as the turnover is so much more, therefore making a huge difference in profits (or not!)
- Streamlining
 - Try to get as much done in your work hours and as much food delivered as you can and really make an effort to do as little canteen work in your spare time as possible. You need to take the time to recharge each day, every weekend and each school holidays so you are fresh at school and don't get resentful and grumpy towards your work. Even answering texts and emails should be done in work hours if they are not emergencies. A simple acknowledgement and promise of an answer is enough for most people and they will get the message to contact you in working hours in the future. It is so important to value your own time as much as your work time and prevents burnout.



Sources:

- Growing up in Australia
 - <https://growingupinaustralia.gov.au/research-findings/annual-statistical-report-2016/teen-employment-experiences>
- Monash University
 - Communicating Health: Speaking young adults' language when it comes to health; 19 October 2020
- School Nutrition Association, Top 10 Ways to Involve Students in Your School Nutrition Program
 - <https://schoolnutrition.org/Resources/MktComm/Engage-Top-10-Ways-to-Involve-Students-in-Your-School-Nutrition-Program/#inform>