

How to get the most out of the juices market

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This summer looks likely to be the warmest on record globally, say experts at the Met Office. So what does that mean for the juice, smoothie and cool-drinks market? *Ian Boughton* reports

The smoothie and juice sectors have grown for two reasons - they're seen as both refreshing and healthy. We now have "detox", "cardio", "anti-flu" and "energy" smoothies, all of which have led to the discovery of new ingredients and the rediscovery of fruits such as the pomegranate.

Figures from Mintel claim the smoothie market is worth £134m and the juice market more than £700m. Juice is the fastest-growing soft drink after bottled water. Smoothie companies return big figures - Innocent sells two million smoothies a week around the world, and Pepsi thought it worth paying £20m to buy the PJ Smoothie brand just over a year ago. There are reckoned to be two dozen juice bar chains in the country, and even Butlins now has them on site. Mobile juice and smoothie carts in shopping malls have been known to take £800 in a day.

The two concepts are partly interchangeable, with smoothies accounting for as much as 80% of sales from a juice bar and the base for a smoothie usually being a fruit juice. There's even International Smoothie Week, which is largely the Big J brand's own promotion and runs from 18-24 June.

So what constitutes a smoothie? Big J complains that there's no definition, which is why cheap operators have got a foothold in the market. It should, says managing director Josephine Beach, be a blend incorporating whole fruit without anything added to artificially enhance or dilute, and that any "diluted" smoothies should be labelled "smoothie drinks". The message to the caterer is - promote the wholesomeness of your ingredients.

There's a need for expertise at the retail end, and a juicing academy, run by Projuice of Exeter, was formed because many operators still have only a sketchy idea of what the juice and smoothie concept is. "Any operator who hasn't researched the smoothie concept must be mad," says Projuice's managing director Paul Ford. "We know what's going to happen - this market is not just going to double or triple it's going much further than that."

easier to serve

Ford recommends blending smoothies to order because while branded smoothies in bottles are easier to serve, they have a limit on retail price and margin.

By contrast, the theatre of doing it yourself boosts both your price and your margin. The customer must still see that the drink is specifically made to order but today, instead of the operator having to juggle a collection of fresh fruits, the ingredients are in prepackaged sachets, already mixed according to recipe and put through the individually quick frozen process. The sachets are kept frozen until needed and then the customers clearly see real fruit going into the blender to make their drink.

The base for such a smoothie will be a real "not from concentrate" fruit juice. Sticking to a menu in which all blends are based on orange juice, or apple and orange juices, cuts out a lot of work.

A new area for smoothie recipes is the "booster" concept. This relies on the physical effect based on the attributes of each ingredient. In the Projuice range, the "detox" booster may use pineapple and strawberry, a "vitamin C" booster is strawberries and mango, the "energy surge" is raspberries and blueberries, and so on.

"But this doesn't mean smoothie fans are holier-than-thou, alcohol-avoiding fitness fanatics who have never enjoyed a good night out," says Richard Canterbury, managing director of Love Smoothies, who says the whole key to a smoothie business is having fun with healthy ingredients. In his menus, Winter Warrior is a mix of carrot, ginger, kiwi and orange juice, Flu Fighter is kiwi, banana, pineapple, yogurt and apple juice, and Cardio Angel is blueberry, raspberry, banana and apple juice. In addition, he provides "Uber boosts", which are optional supplement ingredients - echinacea, green tea powder, bee pollen, ginseng, and the recently-popular açai, now referred to as the wonder fruit. These are added to the smoothie to boost the nutritional value of the drink.

In health ingredients, a surprising star of the market last summer was pomegranate, and Pomegreat claims to have been the brand that drove it. The brand has now launched Pomegreat & Açai, described as an exotic superfood combination. The pomegranate has a reputation as an aphrodisiac and there's one legend which says it was the original "apple" in the Garden of Eden.

Pomegranate also crops up in recipes from Belvoir Fruit Farms, where managing director Peverell Manners says that 97% of people drink soft drinks while out socially, that 43% want a bigger "healthy" choice, and yet 60% never check the ingredients. Belvoir has now introduced Good Stuff, a concept of fresh 100% fruit juices, all slightly sweetened with natural grape juice. And Bottlegreen Drinks Co has a new still drink, Berrylicious, which takes its vitamin C content not from a powdered additive, but from acerola cherry and lime juices.

The use of vegetable ingredients in juices and smoothies is increasing. Chegworth Valley Juices, produced on a family fruit farm, shows the trend with its new flavours. Besides organic pear and apple juices there's the unusual apple and beetroot.

Beetroot also features in the James White range of organic vegetable drinks, alongside the carrot and apple blend which won a Soil Association award, and the new blend of tomato, celeriac, carrot, cucumber, beetroot, dill and parsley.

Managing director Lawrence Mallinson has a background in soups. His Big Tom is a variety of tomato juice which, with 19 ingredients, is suggested as a lunch on its own but also makes a good base for blending.

<http://www.caterersearch.com/Articles/2007/05/16/313736/how-to-get-the-most-out-of-the-juices-market.html>