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Single and Lovin' It

Frozen microwave pizza making inroads with today's smaller households.

Form follows function and retail trends follow demographics, which is about all one needs know about the microwaveable pizza-for-one trend.

"The number of one- and two-person households keeps growing, as does consumer demand for premium pizza," says Joyce Hodel, a spokesperson for Kraft Foods, Northfield, Ill. Consumer demand for premium single-serve pizza through 2007 was growing at more than 8%, or about twice the rate of the category, according to ACNielsen, so "to align with both of those consumer trends, we recently introduced [microwaveable] DiGiorno For One and California Pizza Kitchen For One pizzas to meet the needs of time-pressed consumers who still want a delicious meal."

Tom Vierhile of Productscan Online notes that Kraft has "jumped on this bandwagon big time" linking For One to both the DiGiorno and California Pizza Kitchen brands. "They've identified this as a niche they want to have a bigger piece of," he says.

Kraft is the top player in frozen pizza so when they roll out a new product they can put considerable consumer marketing and [trade] sales support behind it.

"Our marketing is geared to reach consumers where they are 'in the moment,'" says Brigitte Wolf, For One brand manager. "For example, they could be browsing a magazine while between appointments, or spending time online." Along that line, Kraft's For One marketing campaign seeks to engage consumers with an "interactive and entertaining online destination on MySpace.com," says Wolf.

Schwan's Consumer Brands North America, Bloomington, Minn., has had single-serve microwave pizzas on the market for a couple of years. Tony's Pizza For One is available in four flavors while Red Baron Singles is available in six varieties. Both brands' packaging says "oven or microwave" on the front, which indicates they were not developed as microwave-only.

A new player in the market is Mama Rosa's, Sidney, Ohio, which is launching Lean Lifestyle as part of its rollout of both regular size and single-serve pizzas that "meet strict nutritional guidelines of the American Heart Association," says spokesperson Robyn Caulfield. Lean Lifestyle On the Go is offered in a pack of two microwave single-serve pizzas in Low Fat Cheese, Fire Roasted Veggie and Pepperoni flavors.

Ted Taft, managing director, Meridian Consulting, Wilton, Conn., notes the convenience of single-serve microwave pizzas and how they fill the "fourth or fifth meal" concept of consuming several mini-meals throughout the day.

"My 19-year-old son eats them all the time," says Taft, noting that his family is like others where moms, dads and kids are in out of the kitchen all day long. "He's a swimmer and has practice schedules often during mealtimes, so at 9 p.m. he likes them for a snack, as they can be heated in just four minutes."

Vierhile agrees, noting that families like the Tafts are a viable niche for single-serve pizzas "because the various members of mid-sized families are eating according to different schedules."

But taking into consideration that families with teens are already a big consumer of frozen pizzas, Taft questions why microwavable pizzas are marketed in single-serve packages only rather than in multi-packs or club store-like packaging.

Demographics could be the key again. In two supermarkets on the Upper West Side of Manhattan--which is predominantly comprised of one- to three-person households--each has a solid selection of microwavable single-serve pizzas but very few traditional size pizzas.

Pioneer supermarket on Columbus Avenue had Mr. P's brand from Frozen Specialties Inc., Archbold, Ohio, at \$1.29. Celeste for One from Pinnacle Foods, Mountain Lakes, N.J., was featured with a freezer door promo ad offering 2 for \$3, or a \$1.50 each, just a few cents more than Mr. P's.

Pioneer's frozen pizza section also included a few flavors of Amy's single-serve pizza at \$4.99, but they were for heating in the oven or toaster oven only.

Celeste for One had the biggest selection of microwavable single-serve pizzas at Jubilee, a new supermarket to serve residents in the northern part of Riverside South, a line of nine, 30-story, gleaming glass-and-brick condo towers built along the Hudson River between West 72nd Street and the lower West 60s. Celeste for One sells there for \$2.50 each, merchandised with Elio's and Bagel Bites in a frozen pizza section that offers microwavable single-serve only.

"My hunch is that the longer-term outlook for something like this is pretty good," says Vierhile. There are, he points out, "a lot of households out there that are

small, single-person or two-person households, and you've got growth at a couple of different ends here, from young marrieds to empty nesters. In addition, divorce continues to splinter households."