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Baking with Viral Trends



Pop culture fads and special events present a unique opportunity for bakeries to offer—and profit from—themed, limited-edition goods.

The **Chocolate Moose Bakery & Café** in Greenville, South Carolina, for example, saw sales spike when it created cookies to commemorate its place in the path of totality during the 2017 solar eclipse, according to co-owner Emily Dallam. The cookies, shaped like South Carolina, were decorated in starry night sky colors.

“August can typically be slow for us; it was one of the best months of the year,” Dallam says.

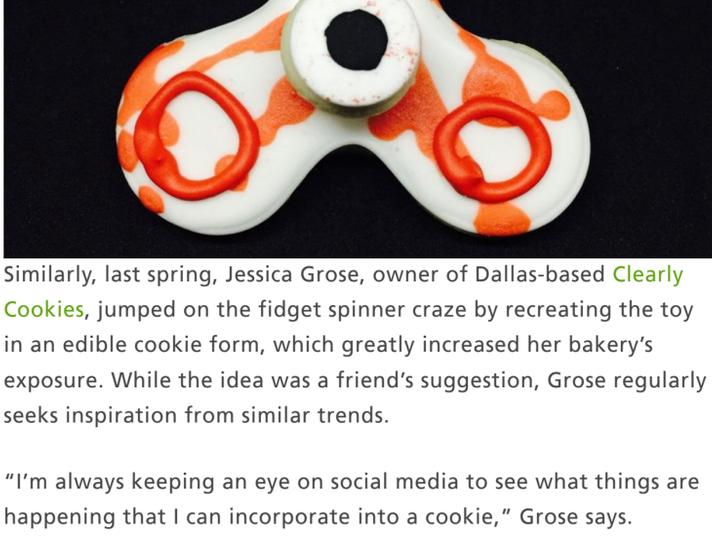
In addition to an immediate boost in business, running trend-themed promotions can have long-term benefits in terms of brand exposure and customer reach—provided they’re carefully planned and executed.

Consider the following tips to identify viral phenomena, determine production amounts and map out marketing for this type of limited-time offer (LTO).

Track Viral Trends for Your Bakery

Once-in-a-century events like a total solar eclipse are just one potential source of inspiration. Sam Meyers, owner of **Sugared And Iced** in Irvine, California, finds customers’ orders can be a good indication of what trends are on the horizon.

“I tend to get requests in groups, and if it’s not something I’m aware of, then that forces me to be like, ‘Is this something popular?’” Meyers says. Many of these trends are based on TV shows, video games and toys. “We had a run of Shopkins when they were really popular—it was one order after another,” she says.



Similarly, last spring, Jessica Grose, owner of Dallas-based **Clearly Cookies**, jumped on the fidget spinner craze by recreating the toy in an edible cookie form, which greatly increased her bakery’s exposure. While the idea was a friend’s suggestion, Grose regularly seeks inspiration from similar trends.

“I’m always keeping an eye on social media to see what things are happening that I can incorporate into a cookie,” Grose says.

Map Out Bakery Production Requirements

Deciding how much of an LTO your bakery should make can be tricky, especially in situations where, like The Chocolate Moose’s, you anticipate a crowd but aren’t sure how many customers to expect.

“We used one of our busiest weekends each year as a baseline, and said, ‘Anything nonperishable—flour, sugar—we’ll just get in bulk because we’ll use it soon,’” Dallam says. “We ordered a little more butter but knew we might have to go to Costco or a local restaurant supply store if things got a little hairy.”

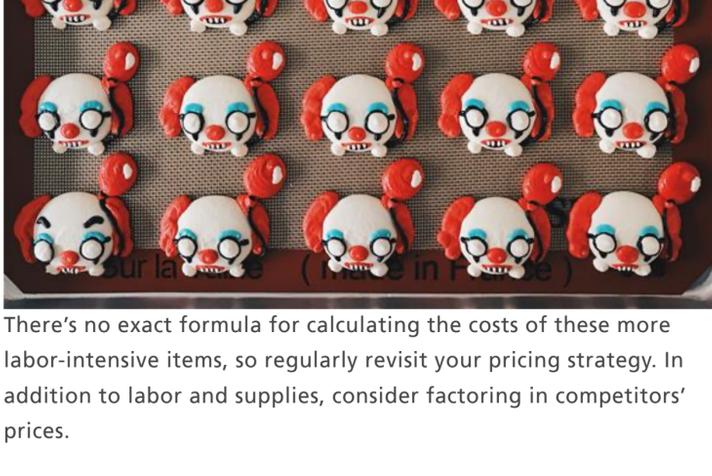
Clearly Cookies, alternatively, employs an order-based structure for LTOs, which ensures the bakery only buys the ingredients needed for each purchase.

Even if you don’t plan to capitalize on a viral trend immediately, you can ensure your bakery’s prepared when an idea hits by **talking to suppliers** about what’ll be required to get extra products quickly and cost-effectively.

Pricing for Special Bakery Items

Honey & Butter co-owner Leanne Pietrasinski advises businesses that hand-decorate each item to factor any additional labor involved into prices.

Last September, the Southern California bakery offered scary clown-themed cookies to celebrate the release of the movie “It.” Though the bakery’s standard macarons are \$2 each, Pietrasinski priced the clown ones at \$5 because they involved a more complex design. “The time we spend decorating it is the biggest factor,” she says.



There’s no exact formula for calculating the costs of these more labor-intensive items, so regularly revisit your pricing strategy. In addition to labor and supplies, consider factoring in competitors’ prices.

Make the Most of Social Media in Your Bakery

Using Facebook, Instagram and other image-driven social platforms can be the most effective way to quickly spread the word about this type of LTO. Beyond clear, high-quality pictures of your creation, consider what else will convey its novelty.

After Grose **shared a video** of herself twirling and biting a fidget spinner cookie, coverage snowballed: Outlets like HLN, Eater and Mashable picked up the video.

“Showing it helped people understand this really does spin, and you can eat it. That doubled the wow factor,” Grose says. “I never dreamed of it going viral, but then I had the CEO of T-Mobile tweeting about it, and it was featured in the October issue of the Food Network Magazine. That brought a lot more business and name recognition.”

Another important consideration is hashtags. Beyond the name of the event or phenomenon, think about phrases associated with it.

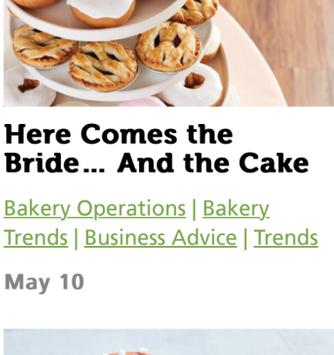
When Meyers shared an image of the “Star Wars” character cookies she’d designed for a client’s “The Last Jedi” premiere party, she included a reference to the franchise’s catchphrase: #MayTheForceBeWithYou.

With a little creativity, effective planning and strategic marketing, your bakery can make the most of viral trends.

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