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MARKET PROFILE



Light up the Barbie

THE IRISH BBQ SEASON MAY BE SPORADIC BY NATURE, BUT IT'S ONE THAT CONSUMERS EMBRACE WITH EVEN THE SLIGHTEST HINT OF SUNSHINE. MORE IMPORTANTLY, CONSUMERS ARE WILLING TO SPEND ON THEIR SPREAD. **GRAINNE BURNS** REPORTS.

Just like the ice cream category, barbecue sales also enjoyed a recent surge with the unexpected good weather during Easter. As recently published Nielsen data shows, the four weeks running into the Easter weekend proved fruitful across many categories.

Sales in deli and ready to eat salads were up 20%, prepacked cooked meats 8%, salad veg 17% and mayonnaise 30%.

Outdoor dining has become more

fashionable of late, perhaps due to the resurgence in home entertaining and cooking.

The static property market has also led to more homeowners investing in their abode to maintain it, and this includes the garden area.

According to the Nielsen data, sales of plant seeds and bulbs were also up by 5% during that period, as too was BBQ equipment.

Retailers have honed in on this sector more of late, with wider ranges in furniture and grow your own plants. This investment is yielding some return, with more consumers choosing

the multiples and discounters for their gardening needs.

According to recent data from **Empathy Research** for our *Retail Intelligence* publication, 60% of shoppers said the selection in this category was as good as that in a specialist garden centre.

Whatever the influence or shopping trend, barbecues have never been so popular.

To promote barbecue usage in Ireland, the 7th National BBQ week takes place between May 30 and June 6. This awareness campaign has been instrumental in promoting outdoor dining, with an estimated 1.8 million barbecue events now being held annually.

So what can retailers do to capitalise on this interest and spend?

Given the tentative nature of Irish weather, barbecue planning tends to be more ad-hoc and retailers should be able to fulfil this convenience trend.

While illegal to use in many parks and beaches, disposable BBQs are the preferred choice for the novice, as well as those dwelling in apartments (with balconies, naturally).

Lighter fluid and heating fuel should also be displayed near this stock to maximise sales.

The affordability of gas and charcoal barbecues has also led to higher sales, with the overall outdoor dining market now estimated at circa €335 million.

Barbecues tend to centre on a few of the basic foodstuffs such as burgers, sausages, chicken, steaks etc. Skewers and ribs are also popular, as too are meats sold in pre-made marinades.

Fish has become a popular choice for more experienced BBQ chefs, while retailers should have a sufficient vegetarian range available.

This includes meat-free burgers, as well as other vegetable offerings such as corn on the cob, potatoes, peppers etc.

Having a broad selection of bread, including wholemeal baps and pitta breads, is important to suit all consumers, including those who are health conscious and have special dietary requirements.

Pre-washed and pre-packed salads tend to prove more popular during summertime, while sauces, sides and dressings are also necessities.

Dining al fresco Irish style normally includes beverages, as demonstrated by the Nielsen data from April. Sales of table wine were up 6%, sparkling wine up 44% and beers by 15%.

Finally, although the ad hoc nature of the category (because of the weather) makes it hard for retailers to plan in-store activity around the barbecue category, consider holding tastings and samplings of barbecue foods, while retailers should also look at all-in-one solutions to tempt shoppers who may be daunted by the category.

For example, a deal which combined a disposable barbecue with pre-marinated meats and salads would help convince consumers who might think that it is all too much hassle.