

## The new pleasure paradigm

Keep pace with changing consumer tastes by tapping into premium trends.

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by Monica Watrous



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*This is the second in a four-part series covering the Hartman Group's "Driving Growth 2017" symposium. Read the [first part](#).*

SEATTLE — If humans are hardwired to seek pleasure from food and beverage, why are we buying less soda and fast food? Such icons of indulgence are facing declines, noted Jennifer Goodrich, senior consultant at the Hartman Group.



"We've seen categories traditionally oriented toward pleasure take a bit of a decrease in terms of growth these days," Ms. Goodrich said during the Hartman Group's "Driving Growth 2017" symposium on Sept. 27 at the Edgewater Hotel in Seattle.

Pleasure remains a top driver of food and beverage purchases; however, consumers perceive and experience pleasure differently today. In the past, she said, "we enjoyed and appreciated the idea of mass produced, uniform products ... that was pleasurable to us."

Today, attributes such as freshness, authenticity and experience provide pleasure, Ms. Goodrich said.

Pleasure plays a key role in the modern-day consumer's view of health and wellness. The occasional indulgence is critical to maintaining mental and emotional well-being, Ms. Goodrich said.

Jennifer Goodrich, senior consultant at the Hartman Group

"Premium pleasure is about moving away from this idea that indulgence is a forbidden treat and something you should feel bad about and toward opening the doors to these really experiential and fun products," she said. "It's still indulgent, but it's an indulgence consumers walk away from thinking, 'Wow, that was really worthwhile,' versus, 'Oh my gosh, I really wish I hadn't done that.'"

Key elements of the new pleasure paradigm include simple ingredients and nuanced flavor profiles. Such attributes elevate a classic indulgence to a premium, more permissible experience, Ms. Goodrich said, citing as example Mighty-O Donuts in Seattle, which uses certified organic ingredients to prepare donuts from scratch and donates leftovers to non-profit organizations to reduce food waste.



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“Finding new flavors, exploring new ingredients, is just fun,” Ms. Goodrich said. “It’s fun to shake things up every now and then. Consumers really like doing this. They find it to be a pleasurable activity. And global flavors are something we find being increasingly relevant today.”

Consumers are adding a broad range of new and unique flavors and ingredients to everyday eating occasions, she said. Even regional favorites, from Southern biscuits to Buffalo sauce, tap into consumer desire for authentic cuisines and experiences.

Technology has transformed how consumers engage with food. Consumers have adopted a more active role in shaping food culture and industry.

“We see an entrepreneurial spirit in consumers today with start-ups and micro-venture capitalism as the ultimate form of self-expression,” Ms. Goodrich said. “Because if there’s something you want to change or create, you can, and platforms like Kickstarter allow for that. Food-related tech start-ups last year alone raised about \$5.7 billion in about 275 deals.”



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Cooking remains a valued activity, but today’s time-strapped consumer seeks shortcuts such as meal kits and prepared foods in the supermarket deli, a department that is growing six times as fast as total grocery, Ms. Goodrich said.

“What’s mainly critical here is these options are customizable so they can meet a variety of diets and desires and needs from various family members,” she said. “It’s a great way for someone to buy one item and then spend the time creating and expressing and coming up with something from scratch as a side.”

To tap into today’s pleasure principles, it is critical to move beyond the temporary “high” often associated with pleasure and focus on real ingredients and updated flavor profiles, while stoking consumer desire for self-expression, Ms. Goodrich said.

“There is always a chance to buy into this space ... but there’s also opportunity to revamp current products.”