

INTERNATIONAL

Sandwich & snack news

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ISSUE 154 DECEMBER 2014

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'The best lunch! *we've ever had*'

Attendance was up 5% at the award-winning lunch! food-to-go show. Simon Ambrose reports

Renowned for attracting a who's who of buyers from across the food-to-go sector, lunch! welcomed a record 6,215 attendees through its doors over 23-24 September.

Now in its seventh year, the sold out show featured almost 300 exhibiting companies and enjoyed a 5% increase in total unique attendees (excluding revisits); compared to 5,924 in 2013. That's a 44% increase since 2012.

Many of the country's biggest high street operators, food retailers, and contract caterers were in attendance, including AMT Coffee, Aramark, Boots, Caffè Nero, Costa Coffee, Debenhams, EAT., Elior UK, Greggs, Harris and Hoole, John Lewis, M&S, Pret A Manger, Rail Gourmet, Sainsbury's, Sodexo, Starbucks, Superdrug, Tesco, Waitrose, and Morrisons. More than 2,000 independent outlets were also represented.

Cafés, coffee houses, sandwich shops, and tea rooms were by far the show's biggest audience (25%), followed by contract caterers, distributors and wholesalers, and supermarket/multiple at 16%, 13% and 10% respectively. Travel catering, specialist food stores and delis, and venues and attractions made up a combined 19%.

"We are delighted that our seventh year of lunch! was our best show yet, with a record number of visitors and exhibitors for 2014," says Chris Brazier, group event manager for lunch!. "It really does cap a brilliant year for lunch!, after winning Best Trade Show at the Exhibition News Awards. Thanks must go to all our visitors, exhibitors, media and association partners for helping us put on the best lunch! we've ever had."

Exciting, innovative, excellent, and enjoyable – were just some of the words attendees used to describe lunch! 2014 after the event.



"What a fantastic show! Yet again lunch! delivered innovation and exciting products for our market," says Andrew Rose, head of purchasing at Caffè Nero.

"lunch! 2014 was a terrific event, not only a great opportunity to catch up with current suppliers but to meet some really exciting new suppliers, bringing great innovation to the industry," says Victoria Doherty, category procurement manager at EAT.

"lunch! was a really worthwhile day out of the office," agreed Paul Morgan, buyer – sandwiches, sushi and salad at Sainsbury's. "It was a great chance to discover new products, as well as suppliers. The 'working lunch' seminars are always interesting and it's great to hear what else is happening in the market."

Looking ahead to 2015, lunch!'s organiser Diversified Communications UK has already announced a 25% increase in stands to accommodate growing demand from food, drink, packaging, technology, and equipment suppliers – an expansion which will take the exhibitor total to 350 companies for the first time.

"Rebooking for lunch! 2015 has smashed all previous records," says Brazier. "Given the waiting list ready to book their stands, and even with the addition of a new hall, lunch! 2015 looks set to sell out in record time."

The high turnout at the show reflects the ever-growing popularity of food-to-go in the lunchtime market. To quote Emma Read, director of marketing and business development at the insights firm Horizons (host of the show's opening Working lunch! Theatre session): "The lunch market is a good place to be – vibrant and growing, with consumers eating out more."

"The lunch market has seen many changes over the last few years and remains a key eating out occasion," says Read. "More people are eating out and more often but their expectations are higher than before – they want good quality at a good price and often something they can eat on the move. Successful operators are responding by offering a good price point, speedy and efficient service to compete with fast food outlets, and lighter, healthier options."

Read sees little threat to the continued growth of the lunch market, which enjoyed £44.9bn of sales according to Horizons' Market Structure and Trends 2013 report. For many, the continued success of the show itself is a clear sign that food-to-go in the UK is thriving.

Other Working lunch! Theatre highlights (sponsored by Magrini) included popular sessions by Sarah Doyle, brand director, EAT.; Henry Dimpleby, co-founder, Leon & The Sustainable Restaurant Association; and Cyril Lavenant, NPD Group director of foodservice UK, revealing that Londoners visit fast food outlets and other chains to buy a take-out lunch more frequently than people in the rest of Britain (but get charged 24% more on average than the rest of the country).

Steve Flanagan, director, marketing and category at Starbucks UK, and Tim Hall, creator of Pod, shared their big news on the second day of lunch!, announcing plans to offer selected food from Pod's breakfast and lunch ranges at three Starbucks stores in central London for a trial period.

BRITISH SMOOTHIE CHAMPIONSHIPS 2014

The popular live finals of the annual British Smoothie Championships (sponsored by Magrini) has built an exciting reputation for keeping lunch! show audiences firmly on the edge of their seats. And this year was certainly no exception.

Open to all professional smoothie baristas in the UK, this year's champion – Indie Wilson-Fish from Juicafe in Lancaster – won over the judges with her Lucuma Matata creation; beating off stiff competition from runners up Celeste Zaccaria from ShakeTastic and Imma Porcaro from Crussh.

"We are really excited to have won the British Smoothie Championships 2014, having been in the top three most years," comments a delighted Indie Wilson-Fish. "It is fantastic for our team to have the recognition for all the hard work that they put in throughout the year, designing and delivering fresh new smoothies. For eight years our customers have experienced our commitment to quality and innovation, and seen our passion for delicious smoothies. We take pride in winning this title, as it will cement our position as innovators and leaders within the food and drink industry," she says.

INNOVATION CHALLENGE AWARDS

Audience participation was also key to the prestigious Innovation Challenge Awards. Designed to promote and celebrate genuinely new ideas in the market place, including brand innovations and new twists on established concepts, the Innovation Challenge Awards saw short-listed finalists (as voted for by lunch! visitors on the first day of the show) pitching their innovative ideas to a panel of industry judges (which included industry entrepreneur Jesper Toft; co-founder of Pod, Alastair Eperon; and Clare Benfield, Editor of Café Culture Magazine).

The following companies received Innovation Challenge Awards at lunch! 2014:

Gold

- Wribbon: ELLER foodPackaging GmbH
- Jools: Jools
- mini NOM NOMs: mini NOM NOMs
- Oppo Ice Cream: Oppo Ice Cream
- Tri-Label Online: Tri-Label
- Whitworths Shots: Whitworths – Healthier Snacking

Aylin Haas from ELLER foodPackaging GmbH said afterwards: "A great success yet again! We struck Gold the second year in a row in the innovation challenge and ran out of business cards by the end of day one. If we could only do one trade show a year, it would be lunch!."

Commended

- EssentialFood: G&G Food Supplies
- Apple and Cinnamon Love Fruit Tea: Love Taste Co
- Metcalfe's skinny Selfie Range: Metcalfe's skinny
- Phat Soup Server: Phat Pasty Co
- Tri-Pot™ Deli Pots: Tri-Star Packaging

Finalists

- Vita Aloe: Asiana Ltd
- Butterfly Cup: Butterfly Cup
- Fru Snax: Premium Snack Company
- Simplee Aloe Drinks: Simplee Aloe Drinks

lunch! 2015

lunch! will return to the Business Design Centre in Islington, London, on Thursday and Friday, 24-25 September 2015.
www.lunchshow.co.uk.



Homemade style tartlets

apple - pear - apricot - cherry
 forest fruit - rhubarb



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