

# FOODSERVICE CONSULTANT

**B ARLENE SPIEGEL**



## Creating identities

It's not just the food or the decor that makes a successful dining operation – it's the brand narrative. Howard Riell asked foodservice consultant **Arlene Spiegel** FCSI (right) how you inject that extra touch of personality

**D**ining operations are *whats*. Making them *whos*, too – giving them an identity, a history, a story – can only make the experience richer and more fulfilling for patrons.

As management guru Tom Peters once said: “Storytelling’s power is timeless.” And David Armstrong, COO of Armstrong International and author of *Managing by Storying Around*, added, “Thar’s gold in them thar stories.” So how do you tell that story?

“Basically it’s about branding,” says Arlene Spiegel founder and president of Arlene Spiegel & Associates and Hospitality Matchmaker, a restaurant, retail and

foodservice consultant in New York City. “It’s really about how you differentiate yourself and express your experience and your culinary point of view.”

What Spiegel does is go through a concept’s culture and messaging in terms of design, menu and the relevance to the communities it hopes to serve. She asks: “What is edgy and different about you to resonate with a very fickle audience?”

A classic example is a concept that Spiegel created two years ago that went through three name changes before finding an identity consumers would accept.

“People really, really want to support, be a fan of, they want to like what an owner is trying to do,” Spiegel says. “They decided that a lot of people are getting off of dairy now, and so they wanted to have a fruit-based product.”

“The most interesting part of the concept, besides having an excellent product, was Chloe Epstein (pictured aside), one of the owners. She has three children and couldn’t find

really great snacks and desserts for them. She started to become the personality.” Once they changed the name, again, to Chloe’s Soft Serve Fruit, it became a hit. “Now it’s resonating,” says Spiegel.

The same approach, in fact, works in the institutional arena, as well. “It’s really not just about restaurants,” Spiegel conrms. “Cafeterias in institutional environments, in entertainment/gaming/casinos venues, or in academic or corporate environments work the same way. What you do there is create an identity that is identified with the overall host environment.” It’s what she did successfully at Hearst Publishing. There, Café 57 – so named because the building is on 57th Street in Manhattan – reflected the identity of the editors, writers and publishers who worked there in order to give them “a sense of place”.

Crafting that identity, Spiegel says, requires adhering “very, very specifically to the goals of the food-and-beverage service, and the location, and to the owners’ desire to brand themselves on a regional or even a local basis.”

Know any stories? ■

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