



## Product Perplexity

### Handle a product change with finesse

“Something’s different about this slice.” Your customer just zeroed in on your change in dough, cheese or sauce. Maybe you changed because your distributor went bankrupt. Or maybe you want to switch to fresh, organic ingredients to keep up with trends, but what do you do now?

If you’ve been utilizing a certain type of flour that’s become unavailable, the quality decreases, or the price goes up, find an equal or better substitute and begin adjusting the recipe. Rather focus on providing a higher-quality product with organic, fresh or non-GMO ingredients? Understand if that’s important to your customers first, then create a product that’s as close to your fan favorite as possible, if it was selling well.

With new brands and ingredients storming into your operation though, how do you manage quality control in terms of taste? Arlene Spiegel, president of Arlene Spiegel and Associates, recommends using a process map and being as scrupulous with the new product as the previous one. “It’s something to be taken seriously

and needs to go through rigorous experimentation until you’re proud of the outcome. That’s when you go to market with it,” she says.

Whether or not you focus on this change in a major component, like dough, cheese or sauce, should revolve around the comments you’re garnering from customers. If they do start to notice a change and take the time to let you know about it, there are several options going forward.

Use the opportunity to tell the story of how the ingredients show the brand’s standards, commitment to quality or support of local farmers, suggests Spiegel. Any time there’s a dramatic impact for the customer, put that change in a positive light instead of suggesting you’re fixing something that was broken. Explain that this new ingredient or idea creates a more delicious product, and their specific feedback helps your business grow. Pretending something tastes the same when it doesn’t only leads to a negative customer experience.