



What does it mean to market healthful choices?

Offering healthful foods and beverages in schools does not guarantee that students will choose them. To help young people improve their eating habits, schools must promote healthful choices by adopting some of the effective techniques used by the food industry.

Effective marketing involves more than just communication. Marketing means focusing on the target audience and learning how to satisfy its needs and wants. Effective marketing centers on designing the best marketing mix, also known as the 4 Ps:

- Identifying and offering **PRODUCTS** that meet student needs.
- **PLACEMENT** of products in locations so they are easy to choose.
- **PROMOTION** of products so that students know about them and are motivated to try them.
- Setting the **PRICE** of products so that students will want to buy them.

Products

Effective marketing begins with identifying which healthful products students will buy and enjoy. The best way to find out what products students like is to ask them: taste tests, focus groups, and surveys are all good ways to collect this information.

These resources outline how to involve students in identifying potential products:

- A California guide explains how to develop salad bars with student input:

<http://socialmarketing-nutrition.ucdavis.edu/Downloads/SaladBarDev.PDF>.

- The Generation Fit Action Packet explains how to involve students in trying new cafeteria recipes (available from local chapters of the American Cancer Society or 1-800-ACS-2345).

To maximize sales, all products need to be packaged and presented in an appealing way. Fruits and vegetables need to be fresh, ripe, and attractive; hot foods need to be hot; and cold foods need to be cold. The colorful new milk containers are an excellent example of how packaging helps to make a product more appealing to students.

Placement

Placement is about making it easier for students to make healthful choices; it is about finding out where students are most likely to buy foods and beverages at school and placing healthful products in those areas. For example, vending machines with healthier choices might be placed in high-traffic areas, whereas vending machines selling high-fat/high-sugar items might be placed in more remote areas.

Placement within a food outlet is another way to market healthful items. Placing bottled water and 100% juice products at eye level in a vending machine makes it easier for students to choose these beverages.

Moving fruits and vegetables from the end of an à la carte line to the front is a way to increase sales of these nutrient-rich items.

Promotion

School staff members, especially foodservice staff, can make a big difference in students' perceptions of nutritious choices. Their enthusiasm for these options, along with role modeling and customer service, are important keys to promoting nutrition at school.

Schools also can promote healthful food choices through the following activities:

- Advertising (e.g., posters, information on menus, public address system announcements)
- Public relations (e.g., articles in school newsletter, press releases to generate media coverage)
- Point-of-purchase promotions (e.g., sampling near sales locations, displays, contests)
- Other promotional activities (e.g., school contests or classroom activities promoting fruit and vegetable snacks).

A 2001 school marketing report by the National Food Service Management Institute⁶⁴ (www.cde.state.co.us/cdenutritran/download/pdf/Marketmiddlegrade.pdf) concluded that promotional messages targeted to middle school students are more effective when they:

- Identify the explicit rewards and barriers that are perceived by the target audience.
- Are simple, strong, repetitive, consistent, and specific about desired behavior.

- Promote benefits in terms of taste instead of nutrition.
- Are upbeat to engage and excite children and teenagers.
- Convince children and teens that selecting nutritious foods is simple to do.
- Are presented in a catchy and easily remembered format.

Price

Price is an under-appreciated component of the marketing mix, particularly for young people, who are very sensitive to price differentials. For example, temporary discounts (e.g., discount coupons and introductory sales) can be used to motivate students to try new products. Schools can also vary prices based on nutritional quality; for example, they can charge less for healthful choices than for products high in fat and added sugars.

A series of studies conducted by University of Minnesota researchers⁶⁵ illustrates the power of pricing. When schools reduced the price of



healthful food and beverage products and, at the same time, raised the price of products high in fat and added sugars, students bought significantly more of the healthful items. Even with the price variations, schools still maintained their overall vending revenues (www.ajph.org/cgi/content/abstract/91/1/112).

What marketing techniques can schools and districts use?

The following questions can help schools and districts improve the marketing mix:

- How can staff learn more about student needs and wants related to healthy eating?
- How can customer service be better used to help market school nutrition?
- What can be done to maximize the attractiveness, appeal, and convenience of healthful products?
- Would students prefer products different from those currently available?
- Is the packaging of the products attractive?
- Are product containers easy to open?
- How can price be used as an incentive?
- What promotions can market the good taste, fun, increased energy, and other benefits of eating well?
- How can students and other influencers, such as athletes, help in product promotion?
- What are the most strategic placements for food outlets that offer healthful foods and beverages?
- Within food outlets, could the placement of healthful food items be more prominent?

How do schools market healthful options?

CDC's 2000 School Health Policies and Programs Study (SHPPS)³⁶ found that schools use a variety of marketing activities to promote school meals and nutritious food and beverage choices:

- 91 percent of schools promoted the school foodservice program by giving menus to students.
- 86 percent placed posters or other materials promoting healthy eating habits in the cafeteria, and 35 percent placed such materials in parts of the school besides the cafeteria.
- 61 percent included articles about the school foodservice program in a school newsletter, newspaper, or other publication.
- 55 percent included foodservice topics during school announcements.
- 55 percent collected suggestions from students about the school foodservice program.
- 35 percent conducted taste tests with students.

How are schools making it happen with marketing techniques?

Table 8 shows how schools and districts have used a variety of marketing techniques to promote healthful foods (see Quick Reference Guide, page 180, for a complete listing of schools and school districts that have adopted marketing techniques).

Table 8. Marketing techniques used by *Making It Happen!* schools and districts

School	Product	Promotion	Placement	Price
East Middle School, MT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conducted a survey to find out what students liked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students promoted healthful food choices sold in school store as a class project ● Held a public forum on nutrition ● Received coverage of school policy changes from the local TV station and newspaper ● Advertised healthful choices during school announcements ● Offered food samples to students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sold snacks before and after school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Priced healthful items lower than less healthful items
Kingsley Middle School, MI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Installed a milk vending machine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conducted a school-wide calcium promotion campaign ● Took milk moustache photos to create interest ● Involved principal in promotion campaign ● Offered food samples to students ● Received media publicity for campaign kick-off 		
Dairy Vending Pilot, Swiss Valley Farms, IA, and IL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Offered easily opened, attractively packaged milk, cheese, and yogurt in vending machines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Offered food samples to students ● Used signs, contests, and games to promote products ● Obtained feedback about changes to determine next actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Installed state-of-the-art, dairy vending machines ● Placed vending machines in high traffic locations 	

School	Product	Promotion	Placement	Price
South Windsor Schools, CT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Installed milk vending machine ● Increased healthful snack items and fruits and vegetables 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Used big, colorful menus to attract attention ● Linked marketing efforts to physical education program to promote nutrition and physical activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Placed milk machines in cafeterias 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Offered discount coupons for healthful foods ● Increased price for less healthful items
Tolland Public Schools, CT		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Invited a celebrity athlete to promote healthy eating ● Held a class with students to brainstorm a list of healthful snacks ● Posted snack ideas in classroom ● Rewarded (non-food rewards) students for eating healthful snacks 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Obtained lower price for healthful foods
Waiakea High School, HI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased types of healthful beverages and snack items sold 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Used flyers, banners, and announcements to promote healthful choices 		
Westlake Middle School, CO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conducted student focus groups to identify potential snack products ● Increased availability of healthful snacks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Used a nutrition logo, "Eat Smart," on menus, posters, and newsletter articles ● Held an Eat Smart. Play Hard.™ essay contest to promote the campaign 		

Where can schools and districts find information about marketing techniques?

Information and resources on marketing healthful choices to students can be found at the following websites:

- USDA's *Changing the Scene* kit features a guide to local action with tips on marketing and sample activities: www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/changing.html.
- The National Cancer Institute's 5 A Day For Better Health Program uses marketing to promote the consumption of fruits and vegetables at www.5aday.gov, as does the Produce for Better Health Foundation at www.5aday.org.
- The School Nutrition Association (SNA) showcases a number of examples of school-based food marketing activities and research at www.schoolnutrition.org/childnutrition/research. The SNA resource, *Target Your Market*, teaches skills necessary for marketing school foodservice and increasing student participation.
- The Center for Science in the Public Interest's *1% or Less Campaign* uses marketing to encourage the consumption of low-fat milk: <http://cspinet.org/nutrition/1less.htm>.
- The Minnesota Team Nutrition Toolkit, <https://fns.state.mn.us/FNSProg/NSLP/NSLPResource.htm#toolkit> provides dozens of tools for enhancing school nutrition environments including handouts for parents and students, strategies for improving vending machine options, and resources.



"I could have a"

- Water
- 100% Fruit Juice
- 100% Vegetable Juice
- 1% or Less Milk