



THE VALUE OF AUTHENTICITY:

Crafting great
product stories

Who doesn't love a great story? It provides entertainment, information and education while helping us find connection and common ground in our fast-paced and global society – all of which are now increasingly important concepts for consumers.

In the food and beverage world, creating stories that engage people is a great strategy for attracting attention and building trust in brands. But the stories must be based on more than just creative writing... these days, they need to come from a place of authenticity.

If anything, the recent experiences of supply chain issues and shortages of everything from computer chips to toilet paper has made consumers even more interested in where their products come from and how they're made. For brands, developing a strategy of authenticity and telling that story well takes extra effort, but there is plenty of upside for authentic products that have long been associated with premium price points.

It starts with ingredients – and it's now clear that consumers want to know more about the ingredients in the foods and beverages they purchase. According to recent data from Innova Market insights, 85% of consumers globally say that what's in their food is of major importance, and nearly six in 10 want to know where a product comes from and how it's made.¹

Transparency is also a top trend, but communicating that information in a way that is engaging and credible is where authenticity comes in. Innova analysts suggest that authenticity is now a key aspect in the storytelling process for foods and beverages.



Nearly three out of 10 consumers indicate they want to know the stories behind the products they purchase because it makes them real and authentic.²

Defining authenticity

The idea of authenticity in foods has been around for about a decade, as more adventurous consumers began to seek out new or obscure cuisines from unassuming but “authentic” restaurants. Over the past 10 years, the idea of authenticity has taken on added complexity, as food experts began to object to the way the term was being applied too broadly to foods that might meet only a narrow definition of what's authentic.³

Today, the current rise of authenticity in foods and beverages owes a debt to the proliferation of street foods that have introduced new cuisines from around the world, widely perceived to be authentic.⁴ But as with many current food and beverage trends, the definition of authenticity is in the eye of the beholder, so brands are challenged to create products and messaging that align with a variety of beliefs.

Generally speaking, the concept applies to products or ingredients that are connected to something or somewhere meaningful, but they can be positioned as authentic, artisanal or local.⁵ According to data from GNPD Mintel, the number of products launched globally featuring all three of these claims saw steady increases from 2014 to 2019, although these categories did see a 2020 drop in new launches.⁶

What's different in 2021, according to Julian Mellentin, editor of *New Nutrition Business* and author of the annual report, “Ten Key Trends in Food, Nutrition and Health,” is that a decade ago, consumers interested in authenticity tended to be highly educated and high-income earners. Now, he wrote in the 2021 report, “the appeal is much broader, and products with provenance, with an authentic image or produced in an artisanal style are often mainstream.”

Mellentin believes that there are four key strategies for these products:⁷

- 1 Those that are authentic and local
- 2 Products from somewhere else that are different and exciting
- 3 Products made with a process or style seen as authentic (such as Icelandic Skyr or kombucha)
- 4 Products containing a beneficial ingredient that can only be sourced from somewhere specific

The importance of authenticity is also tied to the growing relevance of sustainability in the overall market. The pandemic shone a light on issues with our food supply chain and its environmental impact, as well as problems affecting workers, communities and the treatment of animals, all of which accelerated consumer interest in products that address these concerns.⁸ Products touting authentic ingredients or processing methods help align brands with these ideas.

Furthermore, consumers now want products that are highly personalized, as they adopt individualized eating styles and look for products that meet their specific nutritional, lifestyle and health needs.⁹ Again, foods and beverages boasting artisanal qualities and unique health benefits give products a heightened image of legitimacy.

The mechanics of storytelling

There are many ways to incorporate authenticity into a product's roots, from sourcing ingredients sustainably and

using traditional processing methods to giving back to local communities. But brands are also having to up their game in communicating these stories to customers. The trend began by prioritizing the messaging of concepts like organic, no additives or artificial ingredients, minimal processing and GMO-free, according to trend predictions from Innova Market insights. This has now evolved toward communicating about the use of recognizable ingredients, plant-based alternatives and reduced sugar, fat and salt.¹⁰ Most recently, Innova suggests, the concept has moved toward product messaging about ideas of human and animal welfare, supply chain transparency, plant-powered nutrition and sustainable sourcing.

According to insights from Innova analysts, using direct claims and generic language on product packaging was a popular approach, but today the strategy has moved more toward specificity in communicating authenticity.¹¹ For example, they noted that Korean barbecue or Texas barbecue generated more positive consumer response than generic barbecue products. Another recent strategy is to communicate traceability more prominently on the front of packages instead of at the back.¹²

Ultimately, it's important to remember that many trends are connected to authenticity. So whether a product prioritizes sustainable sourcing, environmentally friendly processes, green packaging or artisanal qualities, telling that story in a way that is clear, concise and transparent is now an important recipe for success.

Ready to craft a great product story? Visit cargill.com/labelfriendly.

¹ Innova Market Insights. "Transparency Triumphs in Building Trust and Safeguarding Brands." May 26, 2021.

<https://www.innovamarketinsights.com/press-release/transparency-triumphs-in-building-trust-and-safeguarding-brands/>

² Innova Market Insights. "Make it Authentic: Innovators Adopt Different Tools to Deliver on Authenticity." September 23, 2020.

<https://www.innovamarketinsights.com/press-release/make-it-authentic-innovators-adopt-different-tools-to-deliver-on-authenticity>

³ Saxena, J. "What did 'Authenticity' in Food Mean in 2019?" Eater.com. December 3, 2019.

<https://www.eater.com/2019/12/3/20974732/authentic-food-definition-yelp>

⁴ Ibid. Innova Market Insights. "Make it Authentic."

⁵ Mellentin, J. "Ten Key Trends in Food, Nutrition and Health 2021. Key Trend 10: The Power of Provenance." *New Nutrition Business (NNB)*. <https://www.new-nutrition.com/>

⁶ GNPD Mintel data, in: "Ten Key Trends in Food, Nutrition and Health 2021." *New Nutrition Business*.

⁷ Ibid. NNB. Ten Key Trends.

⁸ Natural Marketing institute/Research America. "Sustainability: It's Changing, It's Hope Filled, It's Critical Business."

⁹ Innova Market Insights. "Tailored to Fit: The Potential for Personalization." November 17, 2020.

<https://www.innovamarketinsights.com/press-release/tailored-to-fit-the-potential-for-personalization>

¹⁰ Innova Market Insights. "Top Ten Trends 2021, Snacking."

¹¹ Ibid. Innova Market Insights. "Make it Authentic."

¹² Ibid.