

## Your Baby Is Ugly



By KAREN LANGHAUSER, Editor-in-Chief, Food Manufacturing

You've probably all seen the Domino's Pizza® ads at this point. Basically, Domino's pizza tasted terrible; customers complained. Remarkably, Domino's took the criticism to heart, and reinvented its core product, launching a brand new pizza that claims to have crispier crust, tastier sauce, and better (read: real) cheese.

One would think that having the entire country acknowledging that your product—for lack of a better term—completely sucks would bring a company down, but Domino's seems to have found a way to use this to its advantage, as the pizza giant is publically admitting its shortcomings and documenting how these issues are being addressed.

However, Domino's is certainly not the first company to use direct feedback from customers to its advantage. In fact, during my recent trip to Atlanta for the International Poultry Expo, I spoke with exhibitors who were specifically designing equipment based on customer feedback. Triangle Packaging Machinery Company, for example, decided that rather than designing its new XY bagger behind closed doors, the company would sit down with potential customers and design a machine from scratch, based on what these customers liked and disliked about former models and what they were specifically looking for in a packaging machine.

The resulting alpha and beta models were placed in two different food processing plants, free of charge, with no obligation to buy, for several months. The plant managers provided Triangle with constant feedback on the units. Despite the plants facing no pressure to buy the machinery, Bob Williams, VP of Sales & Marketing for Triangle, notes that the trial did lead to multiple orders from one of the companies. But better yet, the trials yielded a final product that was unique in that it was precisely what plants needed.

I have yet to try the "new" Domino's pizza (in fact, I ate quite a bit of the "old" pizza throughout college, despite acknowledging it was pretty terrible on a regular basis) but even if it is only slightly better than the original recipe, Domino's still emerges victorious. In my mind, any company that a) listens directly to its customers and b)

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acknowledges the need for improvement, humanizes itself to a point where it develops a sense of closeness to its customers.

Swallowing criticism isn't easy, especially when you love the product you are selling. As Williams points out, "People don't want to hear that their babies are ugly." But in the end, revamping your product development process could change your relationship with your customers for the better. And while you probably won't get flooded with orders from dorm rooms at 2 a.m., you will see your efforts pay off.

*Are there any other companies out there whose babies need to get called out? Have you tried the new-and-improved Domino's pizza? Let me know at [Karen.Langhauser@advantagemedia.com](mailto:Karen.Langhauser@advantagemedia.com) [1].*

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