



# Gore, ghosts and ghouls

Creepy Halloween fare can be ghoulishly sweet for business, but could bakers be missing a trick... or a treat? Andrew Don investigates

**E**mma Thomas, aka blogger Miss Cakehead, recently posted a message on Twitter: "This cupcake terrifies me." A click on the hypertext link opens an image of a cake topped with cream swirls and a clown's head. Clowns might not be everyone's idea of a Halloween fright, but the cupcake is a good example of the kind of creativity that Thomas believes is needed.

However, her creativity could be a touch extreme for some people's sensitivities. This Halloween, she has created Edible Autopsy, which she describes as the world's most anatomically correct cake on which a pathologist will do an autopsy. Body parts will be offered to the audience to feast on.

The plan is to hold three or four performances, possibly at a London attraction, in an operating theatre-style environment – one at the end of September and then

around Halloween. Even Thomas admits: "It makes me want to gag."

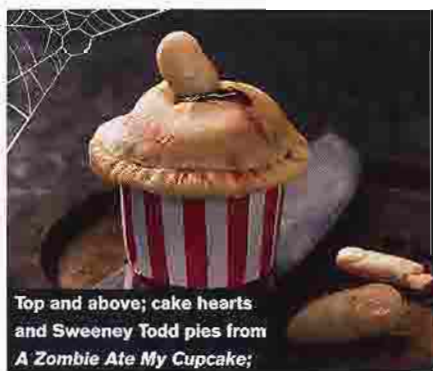
What her ideas illustrate is that anything is possible when it comes to Halloween bakery creations. "I get so uninspired when I go into shops and it is the same old, same old. I think it's laziness or practicalities. People are

scared of it or it's fear of customer reaction. People want different things. They could be offering their customers more."

She cites the London Dungeon, with its extreme blood and gore and lots of body parts, as inspiration. "That's what people should start thinking. If it's cake, anything's acceptable."

A great source of ideas is a book called *A Zombie Ate My Cupcake!* by baker and cake designer Lily Vanilli. This book of "24 deliciously weird cupcake recipes" includes such fiendishly fresh creations as Day of the Dead Skulls, Monstrous Mummies, and Blood-Stained Brains. "If Ozzy Osbourne made cupcakes, these are the ones he'd want to bake," reads the promotional blurb.

Probably any baker could make them, yet you will be hard-pushed to find fare like this in your local high street.



Top and above: cake hearts and Sweeney Todd pies from *A Zombie Ate My Cupcake!*



Vanilli, who has catered for the likes of Elton John and has sold bakery goods at Harrods Food Hall, believes people are getting tired of spiders and pumpkins, which she says do not look that great and are not scary.

She says bakers can make more of Halloween by being less cautious. "People aren't as scared by insects and blood and gore and creepy things as you might think – least of all kids."

However, North Yorkshire-based The Tiny Cake Company's Angie Townsend believes spiders, bats, pumpkins and cats "are still up there" as the favourites for decorations on cupcakes. Townsend will start planning Halloween designs around the beginning of September for her pop-up shop. New additions will be Halloween-themed cake pops, a cake fondant dipped in chocolate and decorated.

"There is always a great deal of competition during Halloween... I work on my own and work hard against the supermarkets and bigger bakeries to get my products seen," says Townsend.

Anya Dyson, Sainsbury's seasonal and celebration cake buyer, says brands and own-label products are becoming more adventurous, with pack and product designs in line with customer demand. "Tradition is core to the event, but new product development is becoming more exciting."

Last year, a surprise success was the Mr Kipling Devil slice which was a bright red colour and used a bold pack design.

Dyson expects customers to continue buying individually wrapped cake bars to hand



out to trick-or-treaters, as well as large centre-piece cakes for increasingly popular Halloween parties.

### Small is beautiful

The Co-operative says novelty lines suitable for parties and trick-or-treaters, such as small cakes, cupcakes and mini rolls always sell well. "We have some great spooky and creepy cupcakes this year, which we're sure will be a big hit with adults and children alike," says

## CSM devises Halloween-themed recipe series

Now the third-largest seasonal event behind Easter and Christmas, Halloween generates over £23m in UK bakery sales. This makes it a retail opportunity not to be ignored. Falling on Monday 31 October this year, consumers will plan their celebrations to span the full weekend, as well as the Monday; for retailers this means three times the sales opportunities. To help bakers create enticing Halloween products, CSM United Kingdom has developed a series of recipes, including Eyeball Cupcakes, Coffin Brownies, Batty Biscuits and Cobweb Cupcakes (pictured left). These quick and simple-to-follow recipes using 'easy to use' cake mixes and fudge icings mean bakers can create a Halloween display while saving valuable time. They also allow for accurate budgeting for price points and maximising profitability. Coffin Brownies, for example, can be made using a new and improved Craigmillar Chocolate Fudge Brownie Mix. One benefit of the mix is that, when baked, there is no crumbling or breaking, making it easy to cut into coffin-shaped portions and decorate with a chocolate fudge icing such as Craigmillar Crembel.

Leah Willcock, category buyer. These include The Co-operative Halloween Creepy Mini Cup Cakes 9s and The Co-operative Halloween Spooky Mini Cup Cakes 9s, both costing £2.

Willcock says Halloween is becoming increasingly important in its annual calendar and it has doubled its own-brand bakery offer this year in anticipation.

However, she stresses how important it is to offer value for money in the current economic climate, so that customers can have fun despite reductions in their disposable income. "Many of the products for Halloween are great pocket-money purchases," she says.

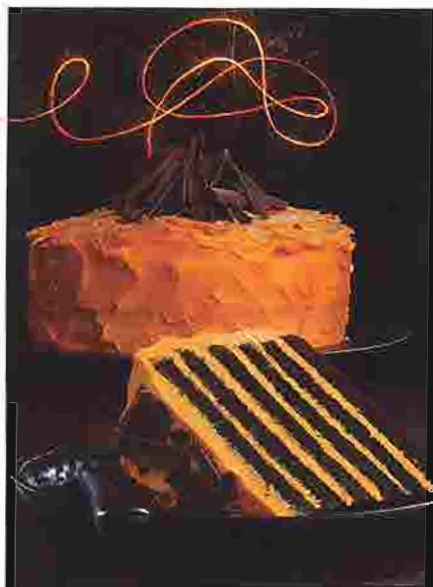
Tesco reports celebration cakes and cookies sold "exceptionally well" last Halloween and traditional shapes and decorations, such as pumpkins and creepy-crawlies, continued to be popular.

However, Phil Davis, MD of Scarborough-based Bakery Products, which trades as Woodhead the Baker, also believes people are probably getting tired of the likes of spiders and pumpkins. "We've always strived to be innovative with our Halloween selection and have a bit of fun with the products, because I believe that is what consumers want."

Halloween-themed cake pops are new additions for this year







### Make magic with mixes

ADM's Halloween recipe card this year features easy-to-prepare formulations for themed treats using its premixes and toppings, featuring devils rock fudge cake, witches' hats and toffee apple layer slice. These also include a hot and spicy ginger parkin, topped with vanilla-flavoured fudge icing; ghosts and broomsticks made from ADM bun mix; and midnight mint marble slice covered in ADM's green-coloured fondant icing mix.

Dawn Foods is encouraging bakers to experiment with its flavoured cake mixes and frostings to take advantage of Halloween. Cake mixes include chocolate, coffee, orange, lemon, strawberry or toffee indulgence – and top with orange (pictured), lemon, strawberry, toffee, raspberry or chocolate frosting.

He expects a 5% uplift in overall sales as a result of Halloween and the business plans to devote the whole of each store's window displays to the festivities in the week up to Halloween as well as a portion of the counters.

### Increasing popularity

Justine Noades, marketing director for Millie's Cookies, cites evidence to show Halloween is getting increasingly popular. "Last year, British consumers spent more than £300m on Halloween and we understand that, for one major supermarket, it has overtaken Valentine's Day as the most lucrative calendar event for confectionery, party goods and costumes."

She says the trick is to make the event work harder than just the one big night of Halloween. "While most sales will naturally fall in the final week prior to Halloween, it is about identifying potential opportunities during the build-up."

Noades says visual merchandising is key combined with point-of-sale, particularly for retailers in busy locations where stand-out is important to attract customers from passing footfall.

Jania Boyd, marketing manager of Macphie, the premium ingredients company, thinks Halloween is a great opportunity for bakers to lift their sales in the quieter months between summer and Christmas. "After the doom and gloom of the recession has taken its toll on consumers, sales of Halloween-themed food products show no sign of a slowdown, replicating their cult success in the US."

Boyd recommends bakers prepare as early as possible. "It only takes a little bit of creativity and effort to make your window display eye-catching and enticing."

She says that a witch's hat and broomstick bought from a joke shop and combined with green, orange and black tissue paper can



Suitably themed cupcakes with pumpkins, spiders and ghosts

*"After the doom and gloom of the recession has taken its toll on consumers, sales of Halloween-themed food products show no sign of a slowdown, replicating their cult success in the US"*

prove to be effective and will last for years if stored correctly.

Getting the point of sale, promotions and marketing right is key. Boyd says it is important to keep the Halloween theme strong and if possible, introduce special Halloween deals such as "treats, not tricks", or "spooktacular deals" to encourage multiple buys of Halloween lines.

Whatever you sell this year, whether tried and tested pumpkins or more extreme shudder-inducers, everyone agrees it is worth getting into the spirit of things and taking your sales to another realm.

Millie's Cookies' spooky styles include vampires, ghosts and witches, and pumpkins

