



Christmas whoopie and
Christmas trees using
Macphie's ingredients

Stained glass windows
using Macphie's
shortbread mix

Festive flair

The year-on-year improvement in supermarket Christmas ranges presents a challenge to craft bakeries at this time of year. **Andrew Don** looks at how they can add value



Christmas novelties designed to appeal to the grab and go impulse (see trends box)

Craft bakeries can easily get an inferiority complex when it comes to the supermarket chains.

Buying muscle, huge resources and vast space mean the big boys can really go to town. But craft bakeries can come into their own by playing to their strengths: specialisation, expertise, quality, service and innovation.

John Haynes, industry consultant from JRH Associates, suggests the following:

- Promote artisan bread to communicate the craft aspect – the fresher the better
- Create your own recipes
- Design your own Christmas bread – perhaps spicy or with chunks of marzipan
- Promote traditional Christmas cakes
- Make your own upmarket mince pies to your personal mincemeat recipe. Make them alcoholic, such as with coconut and Malibu. Top them with crumble or frangipane rather than pastry. Make small amounts but in various sizes
- Offer a limited range of Belgian chocolates
- Sell well-packed, prominently displayed stocking fillers that can be picked up from the counter
- Try Christmas savoury products with turkey and ham, and gammon and pineapple slices for snacks that can be warmed up or frozen
- Stock party food, but make everything in small sizes
- Sell fresh cream gateaux that are better than those in the supermarkets – try chocolate and rum, apricot and brandy
- Offer specials, such as buy six mince pies and get a proprietary Christmas loaf at half price. Do not try buy-one-get-one-free, because small bakers cannot finance this
- Do a range of Christmas sandwiches and

offer a half-price sausage roll with every sandwich sold

- Start promoting from October when you can encourage customers to take orders, so you can plan your production
- Join forces with a farmer's shop, for example, and cross-promote or sell each other's products
- Increase opening hours towards Christmas
- Encourage passing trade by using boards to advertise on the pavement
- Hold shop party nights – give guests a glass of wine and get them to taste products and order. You could hold this with a local winery or off-licence.

Ingredients company Macphie says it is not worth trying to compete with supermarkets on price and multi-buys. Jania Boyd,



The new Christmas trend? Festive cake pops from Renshaw

Tap the trends

The hottest Christmas food item of 2010 was undoubtedly the Heston Blumenthal Hidden Orange Christmas Pudding, made by Hayden's Bakeries for Waitrose. It became so sought-after that it was reselling on eBay for five times its retail price. So the question every baker wants the answer to is how to replicate that buzz?

"I believe one of the reasons for the popularity of the Hidden Orange Christmas Pudding was the combination of tradition and innovation, which gave it such mass appeal; it really caught the consumers' imagination," says Lisa Boswell, marketing manager for bakery ingredients manufacturer CSM UK, which tracks bakery sales across the UK, identifying buying trends and purchasing drivers. "And of course it was packed full of flavour, Christmas indulgence appeal and was a 'limited edition', so consumers perceived they were getting something a little bit special."

Here are Lisa Boswell's tips for this Christmas:

- **Bring your Christmas cakes up-to-date**
When a full Christmas cake is just too much for some customers, give them the option of decorated cake slices or pre-portioned cakes
- **Christmas novelties**
Make a selection of Christmas novelty biscuits and shortbreads that can be used to increase 'grab and go' impulse purchases at lunchtime, school-time and throughout the day
- **Mini-size the big trend**
Pop-in-the-mouth treats not only look attractive, but appeal to those consumers who are health-conscious but still want to enjoy a Christmas treat. Dinkie mince pies, shortbread buttons, bite-sized Christmas cookies, finger-sized brandy snaps with fruit filling and one-bite stollen can all be prepared alongside your normal batch.

marketing manager, says: "Our advice to craft bakers is to choose a different route to gain the edge. Concentrate on what sets you apart: tell your customers your products are local, freshly-made, high-end and hand-crafted."

She says customers want nostalgia and flavours that remind them of their childhoods, so advises not to overlook novelty lines for children. She says cake pops are an emerging trend and are a great way to use left-over cake crumbs and minimise wastage. Boyd points out there are also opportunities for those that have a



Bako North Western is devising creative ways of doing more with lines bakers already have.

seating area. "Afternoon tea is a big trend. Bakers can adjust their afternoon tea to give it a festive feel. They know how much customers are willing to spend."

She suggests turkey and cranberry sandwiches, mini eclairs, mini Victoria sponges and festive cupcakes and pastries, and says bakers can add to the sense of theatre by presenting food on a three-tier cake stand.

Decorated cake pops

Cake pops decorated like reindeers are among the recipes that wholesaler Bako North Western has created for its customers. The recipes also include cake pops decorated like Christmas puddings and snowmen; vanilla Christmas tree muffins decorated with green frosting and sprinkles; spiced chocolate brownies with cinnamon, cardamom and orange peel; and sweet stollen topped with dried cranberries and currants, dribbled with orange flavour icing, shaped as a Christmas wreath.

Nicola Wood, PR and marketing executive at Bako North Western, explains the business is trying to put together creative ways of doing more with lines bakers already have. "We are doing photography for this while we put these recipes together, coming up with a traditional presentation – anything that feels homemade," she says pointing out that homemade is what the supermarkets are unable to do. "Put it on your shelf, decorate it as much as possible... you can be more creative than the supermarkets as they have to do it on a mass scale."

Bako North Western is trying to encourage a German Christmas market ethos in the UK, so that people do not feel they are being mass-marketed to. Wood says such markets look as if a lot of work has gone into each item. "We are trying to give them a very commercial way of being able to do that – anything that helps get that old traditional idea across to customers because, at the end of the day, the baking industry is an old industry. You can use that as a promotional tool."

Kent independent Beaney's says it can personalise products such as snowmen and stars by putting people's names and messages

Around the supermarkets

Asda

Within Asda's Chosen by You range this year will be a Turkey and Ham Pork Pie; Mini Quiche Selection and Slices Quiche selection; Christmas tree-shaped all-butter croissants, which will be freshly baked in-store; Open-topped Star Mince Pies; a 3D Jolly Santa Cake, made with four layers of Madeira sponge, filled with buttercream and raspberry jam and covered in soft icing (pictured); and a Decorate Your Own Christmas Tree – edible biscuit tree kit. Its Extra Special range will feature a Premium Christmas Pudding; Bauble & Snowflake Christmas Cake; Yule Log; and Mince Pie Sundaes – mince pies topped with brandy flavoured buttercream and icing sugar.

Morrisons

Bakery specialist Martin Clayton tells *British Baker* the retailer's new products for this year include a Twelfth Night Bread, made with fruit dough which is "Swiss-rolled up with demerara sugar and finished with flaked almonds, orange and zest". Clayton said that following the success of its stollen last year – it sold two stollen for every panettone – Morrisons has worked to improve it further by using more almond spread, which is layered throughout the stollen. More butter has also been added to its panettone to make it more luxurious, he said. Other sweet treats on offer will include its 'The Best' Giant Mince Pie; a White Chocolate and Raspberry Gateau; Christmas Pudding Pies; 'The Best' Butterscotch and Whiskey puddings; 'The Best' Christmas Pudding; and 'The Best' Jewelled Christmas Pudding Crown (pictured). Marion Muir, NPD manager (confectionery and biscuits), Morrisons, says other new products for this year included Mini Florentines, which come gift-wrapped in clear plastic packaging, finished with a ribbon, so are ideal for gifts. For the kids there will be snowman biscuits and cupcakes, she says, while for the adults, a range of macaroons, produced in Lille, France.

Waitrose

Waitrose will be offering a range of pastry-themed party food from Ham Hock, Spinach and Cheese Tartlets to Mini Beef Wellingtons. A Christmas Dinner Pasty containing turkey, sage & onion stuffing and cranberries in hand-crimped shortcrust pastry, and a game pie featuring venison, rabbit, and pork with juniper berries, will also be available.

A range of Borsari panettone – chocolate, classico, and cherry & almond – will be on offer, as will Fiona Cairns' Reindeer Fairy Cakes, and Red and White Fairy Cakes. The Heston from Waitrose Hidden Orange Christmas Pudding will be back,

and this time with a little sister – a Hidden Clementine Christmas Pudding. Other Christmas pudding options will include a Waitrose Christmas Pudding with Rémy Martin, and a Duchy Originals from Waitrose Organic Christmas Pudding.

Also available are a Duchy Christmas Cake, containing prunes, figs, nuts, apricots, raisins, walnuts, almonds, dates and candied orange (pictured); a Waitrose Richly Fruited Snowflake Cake; Christmas Tree Cake; and Raymond Briggs' The Snowman Fairy Cakes.

Sainsbury's

At Sainsbury's, Morrisons and Lidl, Fox's is entering the Christmas pudding category with the launch of a branded product (pictured) based on research that suggested many

families found traditional puddings too heavy and overly alcoholic, Fox's has slightly reduced the alcohol content to appeal to families. Manufactured by Matthew Walker, it has been produced to reinvigorate the £35m category (Kantar Worldpanel data 16 w/e 26 Dec 2010).

"The Christmas pudding category is very own-label driven, yet with relatively flat sales last year, we spotted an opportunity for a branded option, which appealed to families who want the ritual and magic of a traditional Christmas pudding, but who don't necessarily like the taste," says Wayne Greensmith, Fox's Christmas Puddings marketing manager.



on them. Owner Chris Beaney says his business will make fresh products almost up to the last moment, including fresh cream items on Christmas Eve.

"Most supermarkets make it weeks – and even months – ahead and freeze them. We can offer speciality products we make on the premises, such as Christmas breads and stollen, offering the freshness and the craft side of it. When it comes to bread, all our products are made fresh daily." He says his mince pies, one of his specialties, beat the supermarkets hands-down on freshness. Pastry products are horrible when made in advance, he says. "The baker's pastry is better to eat."

Beaney's is proud of its fresh cream trade and makes birthday cakes and gâteaux at Christmas, which are popular with the local Asian community. "Some bakers concentrate on a lot of fancy Christmas stuff. Our trade is a bit more basic, so we concentrate more on freshness, variety and availability."

He warns against cutting prices. "With most small bakers, once you go down that route, you may find you have worked your socks off for nothing. You have to be brave enough to price according to the market – taking account of rising commodity prices for example."

Christopher Freeman, owner of Dinn's Bakery in Crouch End, north London, agrees

that price is not such a factor at Christmas. "There's an 'oh-sod-it' mentality after all they've put up with year-round. We should make the most of that. It's a great opportunity to show what we can do, the quality with a good window display. Really showcase your stuff."

Freeman emphasises the need to make goods look handmade, individual, high-quality and flavoursome. He says customers appreciate the individual touch and want something that looks good on the table."

Turkey bake

Burbidge's Bakery, in Andover, Hampshire, offers what is known locally as the Great Turkey Bake. Customers bring in their own turkeys at noon on Christmas Eve, which it cooks in three deck ovens for collection at 6pm at a cost of £10 a bird. MD Steve Burbidge says he makes £500-£600 each year and always commits to giving £500 to charity.

Of course, you can feel like a bit of a turkey yourself if you are left with an uncollected bird when you are waiting to shut the shop. This is exactly what happened to Burbidge one year. "We found out the bloke was comatose on the settee."

Fortunately, the inebriated man's wife came to the rescue and they got their Christmas dinner after all.

Twitter Xmas cake-off

We challenged our Twitter followers to come up with inspirational designs for Christmas. Here are the best: Christmas Cuptails by Gill Talbot of Fantasweets and Potted Xmas Cupcakes by Louise Bone of Glorious Cups



Survival of the fittest



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