



## Gourmet Takeaway

**T**he *Gourmet Retailer* held its first Gourmet Insights summit June 16 and 17 in Dallas for retailers of specialty foods and upscale housewares products. It was a full day of intensive learning and sharing — designed for gourmet retailers by gourmet retailers.

The takeaway: There are opportunities for independent retailers. In his presentation, Tom Mirabile, senior vp of Global Trend and Design for Lifetime Brands and the International Housewares Association's trend watcher, shared how consumers spend 34 percent of their budgets locally, but even a greater number — 60 percent — *desire* to spend locally. How can you reach them and turn them into customers?

More and more shoppers are looking for a niche and curated approach when the shop. Attendees learned tips on how, through social media and marketing, to help potential customers discover their store and product selection. Thanks to technology, it has never been easier to make these communications more personal — tailored to the customer's interests — and retailers got some real-world advice from Gary Hawkins, executive director of Center for Advancing Retail Technology, who used to own a food store himself.

Knowing your customer is paramount. Help make the connection and the sale by sharing the stories of your products and producers with your customer. At Gourmet Insights six can-do entrepreneurs shared their creative bottom-line boosters and how they're making real connections with their community and their customers, including:

- Sheana Davis of The Epicurean Connection has long been hosting home cheesemaking classes and Meet The Cheesemaker events in her specialty food store. At Gourmet Insights, she shared how her business evolved to meet a void in her community — a place where people could hang out and listen to live music. Before the schedule change, her Sonoma, Calif., store was closed in the evenings. Now it is a thriving community gathering spot where locals come listen to live music — and buy a cheese plate and a glass of wine. (And a recent shout-out in *Travel & Leisure* has put this on to-do lists of tourists visiting the area.)
- Janet McDonald and Cindy Utecht of The Gourmet Gallery in Oklahoma had everyone on the edge of their seats when they shared how they've created a thriving Gourmet Club that has hundreds of members. For \$25 a month, members receive a goody bag that includes a selection of specialty foods. In addition, the gift bag includes recipes and serving suggestions created by the dynamic duo themselves. (You can read more about Gourmet Insights on page 90.)

The demand for buying local goods and buying goods from locally owned businesses is showing no signs of slowing down. According to our State of the Industry survey, retailers see this as one of the bright spots. (Analysis begins on page 12.) Conversely, concerns about increased competition, online shopping, consumers doing price comparisons — mostly through showrooming on their smart phones — remain top obstacles.

Retailers also shared with us their successes. In-store events and classes drive traffic and create excitement in the store. Bridal, one retailer wrote, has picked up thanks to their “more personal” approach. Made in USA, local foods and healthy natural foods, including tea, remain top categories.

The opportunities are there. Sometimes you just need to recognize them.

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