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VIEWPOINT

Micro-Waves of Change

by Bob Garrisonbgarrison@stagnito.com

Where are the Brazilian supermodels? That was a question posed in my Sunday morning Parade magazine. In case you missed it, Detroit's Tracy Metcalfe recently asked Parade's "Personality Profile" why Russian models were supplanting Brazilians in the fashion world. Parade's answer, in part, read: "Fashion operates with a herd mentality. It's passed out of its "Brazilian moment" and is currently in its "Russian moment."

Just like fashion, the food world has trends that come, go, and come back again. In the late '80s, we were writing about Campbell's Souper Combos (microwaveable soup-and-sandwich combinations) and another of Campbell Soup's microwaveable offerings, the LeMenu frozen meal. These days, we're covering DiGiorno Microwave Rising Crust Pizza and Ore-Ida's Extra Crispy Easy Fries.

And so it appears microwave technology is "hot" once again. Yet there's really more to it than that. Science is driving this change ... not a designer's whim for thin lapels or bell-bottoms.

Packaging industry consultant Huston Keith is the principal with Keymark Associates, Marietta, Ga. In an interview last month, he told R&FF the food industry has made several genuine strides during the past decade.

"Film metallizers have learned to apply optical densities more precisely," he noted. "Food packagers have learned more about placing films and formulating food so it reheats with the right texture, flavor and color."

Small players such as Kahiki Foods, Columbus, Ohio, have used microwave technology to make headlines and garner more attention. For its part, Kahiki applied crisper sleeve technology to egg roll dough. A few years ago, this advance gave the company a noteworthy point of difference in selling egg rolls to convenience store and vending channels. Kahiki now builds on the idea at retail by including its sleeve and egg roll in a unique bowl-and-roll meal combination.

Kraft also is building on microwave research. While it rolls out the DiGiorno product at retail, it's working with the maker of Hot Choice vending machines to offer hot Tombstone products in high-traffic foodservice areas. In this case, Hot Choice units combine microwave and jet-impinged hot air to cook pizza slices.

Still more microwave stories abound. One supplier now claims the first microwaveable aseptic package, an easy-to-handle and heat pouch for sauces that accompany frozen prepared retail or foodservice appetizers and entrees. Elsewhere, Productscan Online, Naples, N.Y., heralded General Mills' Betty Crocker microwaveable Pour & Frost cake frosting as one of 2004's best new products.

Has the food industry mastered the microwave and consistently matched an oven-quality taste? I won't make that claim. Nevertheless, I can't think of a better way to make some of your products more

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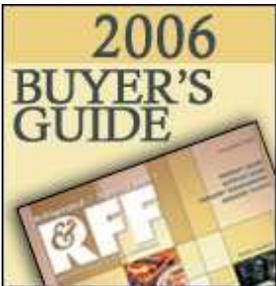
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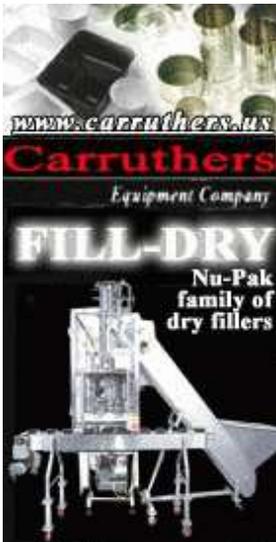
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