

The experiential food marketing experience

 By Leigh Andrews

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Take a dash of Silwood School of Cookery cordon bleu training, add some work on a BBC-commissioned TV cooking show and blend well. What bubbles to the surface? The experiential food marketing trend, and impressive MD of Source Food agency, Kirsty Rowett...

Foodies, foodies everywhere. 'Food' is having its moment, with food channels and shows like *MasterChef* experiencing global popularity. Rowett decided to do something different instead of simply hopping on the bandwagon, by specialising in online content creation with a foodie twist, as well as experiential food catering.



Kirsty Rowett

She has a strong taste for this, having returned to SA after earning her culinary stripes in the kitchens of a well-known London hotel. She actually launched Source as a sort of 'modelling agency' for private chefs to be placed within families. Not as quirky as it sounds, as the agency's focus has since shifted to helping clients achieve sales of their product or brand through the medium of food, in any way possible.

That's clever, as we're so busy in today's world of digital bombardment that when it comes to food we tend to wolf it down while distracted by multi-screens - Source Food's offerings give us the impetus to truly experience the taste, smell, feel, look and even sound of food, while also absorbing the campaign the food is enhancing. That's why there's been a rise in 'tasting' events recently. A 'slow food' marketing movement, if you will.

Taste buds piqued by [this Source Food video](#) of the 'perfect cheese board' created with Pick n Pay, I found out more about the food marketing trend from Rowett...

■ 1. Tell us more about the 'experiential food marketing' trend.

Rowett: As the lines in marketing become blurred, a TTL approach is a necessity for most brands, and our focus on experiential engagement is in line with most of our clients' strategy. Food lends itself so well to being used in this way with the high visual appeal, accessibility, and opportunity to re-create the experience at home, making food the most perfect vehicle for brands to showcase their USP, and this is our niche. Cleverly incorporating your brand into a fun, fast-paced cooking/sensory activity speaks to all audiences and is the perfect vehicle for consumers to share their experience on social media. We are the only solely food-focused agency in SA at the moment.

■ 2. How does the trend differ locally and on the continent to the rest of the world?

Rowett: Using food experiences to market a brand is certainly not unique to SA, but we are barely a step or two behind the markets we draw inspiration from - Australia, the East, Europe, and the US, to a lesser degree. The Australian *MasterChef* phenomenon in particular has left few uncertain as to the impact of food marketing on the general public. At Source Food, we create these type of experiences for our guests and clients all the time. We get our guests to interact with food, to touch, feel and smell it. To eat it. To link it back to the brand.

We are cognisant of the diverse cultures in our country and on the continent, and thus no menu or food concept is ever the same, the demographic for each event is unique and we create food that will push the buttons of our individual guest or brand.

■ 3. Talk us through the process of pulling off this type of event.

Rowett: The creative process is vital in the build-up to an event, so we start with a deep dig into the brand and messaging necessary to achieve the goals of the client, and then get our creative team around the table to come up with some stellar ideas for the event. We work on a national basis, and thus many campaigns are hosted over a series of events in multiple cities, thus careful time planning is involved. Once we have the big idea for the campaign and the basic mechanics of how we will activate the concept, we plan the timeline and move to budgeting in order for the client to receive a full concept. On approval of concept, the final menu and products are detailed. We design all creative work for the event, including stand building. We source staff who are appropriate for the event and have the required level of cooking skill. We create branded uniforms and collateral. We detail specialised menus and conduct detailed recipe testing, food styling and photography. On-site execution of the event is the last stage before we wrap and conduct indepth reporting and final invoicing. Our chefs have worked in the top restaurants and hotels in SA and abroad, and we have taken them out of the kitchen to work on the business side of food. We offer restaurant quality food being created for the SA corporate eventing world, so if you trust us with your brand, you are guaranteed that it will be handled by professionals.



■ 4. Explain your concept of a 'modelling agency' for chefs...

Rowett: Each chef has a 'Z-card', the promo card of the model world, to promote themselves. As food is such a visual medium, we use these talent cards to promote our private chefs to our clients. You do eat with your eyes and our clients are given the luxury of selecting their chef based on the visual appeal of the food cooked by each chef. We also include some fun facts and basic bio on each chef and their daily rate. Models are sold on their looks and our chefs are sold on the look of their food.

■ 5. Everyone's foodie these days - are these specifics we can attribute this to, like [Zomato-style rating apps](#)?

Rowett: Absolutely, none more than Instagram, I should imagine. Eight years ago when we started creating events and experiences solely around food, we thought that the 'fad' was at its peak and we had to strike while the iron was hot. But the iron is still hot and the fad is actually a way of life. People engage with food every day and when they engage with a food brand or a brand using food to engage a client, they don't feel like they are being sold to, they feel like they are having a great time with your brand.

■ 6. Lastly, tying into our Women's Month focus: Does a glass ceiling exist for women in your industry?

Rowett: I don't believe in the glass ceiling effect, particularly in my industry. I am a member of the Entrepreneurs Organisation (EO.org) and I have learned that my place in business as a woman is just as important as that of my male counterparts, my road to building a business and family at the same time is just as tough and my reward of success is just as sweet. My industry is one that revolves around sociability and I find that our clients, suppliers and competitors are an even mix of men and women. I think that as an entrepreneur, one needs to work hard, be trustworthy and deliver in order to succeed. The purported glass ceiling will have no effect should these factors be adhered to, in my mind.

Being a woman has had little effect on my ability to do business with anyone, and by sticking to my goals and plans, and surrounding myself with excellent people, I have been able to navigate the road between running my business and growing my family.

That's what I'd call a successful way of savouring all life has to offer. For more information, visit the [Source Food website](#) or follow their [Twitter feed](#).

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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