**Fast . . . Fruit?**

Average consumers have become more concerned with health and nutrition. Obesity lawsuits have been filed against fast-food giants that have offered only fatty, greasy burgers and fries. As a result, many fast-food chains are now offering healthier alternatives, such as salads and fresh fruit, as well as decreasing serving sizes.

It seems that this shift toward healthier fare is paying off for fast-food chains. According to the Quick- Track® research study conducted by market research firm Sandelman & Associates [(www.sandelman.com)](http://www.sandelman.com/) in 2009, Americans were satisfied with fast food. The Quick-Track is a syndicated market research project conducted quarterly to track key consumer behavioral and attitudinal measures for all major fast-food and pizza chains in individual markets. In this study, each quarter 400 respondents are surveyed in each market via a combination of telephone and Internet interviews in more than 100 markets representing a wide range of demo- graphics. Telephone respondents are selected via a computer-generated random sample of listed and unlisted telephone numbers, and online respondents are selected from a panel of more than 5 million Internet users.

Respondents were asked their opinions of past visits to each fast-food restaurant chain within the last three months. They were asked to rate their opinions on the overall restaurant experience as well as on 12 specific attributes such as food, service, cleanliness, and value. The responses were scored on a scale with 1 = Poor and 5 = Excellent. To ensure reliability and representation of the population, only chains with a minimum of 150 responses were considered.

The three most important attributes for respondents were cleanliness (77 percent rated it as extremely important), food taste and flavor (74 percent), and order accuracy (66 percent). The availability of healthy and nutritious food is increasing in importance among respondents, with 40 percent rating it as extremely important (up from 34 percent in 2003). The overall increase in satisfaction with fast-food chains can be attributed to the chains’ responsiveness to customer demands for food quality, taste, health, and nutrition.

One example of how fast-food chains respond to the consumer’s desire for healthier, tasty food offer- ings is to provide fresh fruit as a menu option. Wendy’s, for example, is now offering fresh fruit bowls as an entrée or as a dessert. McDonald’s is offering a fruit and walnut salad, and IHOP is selling fruit plate entrees. These are not isolated examples in the food industry. According to marketing research firm NPD Group [(www.npd.com),](http://www.npd.com/) fruit consumption in restaurants has increased by more than 10 percent from 2006 to 2009. Kerrii Anderson, president of Wendy’s, commented that now’s the time for fruit, because people are looking for different and new tastes and for healthier alternatives. These examples illustrate the crucial role played by marketing research in designing and implementing successful marketing programs.5 Note that marketing research is being used by all kinds of organizations, such as Boeing, NBC, Toyota, and fast-food restaurants (McDonald’s, Wendy’s, IHOP). Furthermore, marketing research has become global (Harris Interactive), real time (Satmetrix), responsive (Toyota), and much more integrated with marketing and product development (McDonald’s, Wendy’s, IHOP). These examples illustrate only a few of the meth- ods used to conduct marketing research: telephone, personal, and online surveys; focus groups;

in-depth interviews; and the use of the Internet as a source of information.