

Red Lobster: 'Wild Alaskan' tag a sales driver



Photo: Ollie Crafoord

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Jason Smith

NAPA, California -- American seafood restaurant chain Red Lobster views the "wild caught" and Alaskan tags as an important sales drivers, its vice president in charge of supply chain said.

Speaking at the Sept. 24 Napa Seafood Summit as part of a discussion about how to raise American seafood consumption, Nelson Griffin said the chain's 700-plus restaurants had considerable success earlier this year with a promotion touting wild-caught, Alaskan seafood.

The promotion, he said, involved crab, sockeye and coho, and was successful in part because the chain's employees were enthusiastic about it.

"When your servers get excited, your guests get excited because they're talking about it," he said. "It appears for us that wild caught is really a business driver. The problem is it gives you a very limited scope as far as being able to have availability that's fresh."

Educating consumers about the significance of "frozen at sea" is key, he added.

"I know the frozen at sea education is a big thing we've got to do because people don't understand how impactful that is to providing high quality seafood 52 weeks out of the year, which is what we're trying to do," Griffin said.

Conference attendees were discussing what could be done to better market seafood generally and asked Griffin about the company's recent experience with television advertising. He told them that the firm is transitioning to a focus on targeted digital marketing.

Television helps the chain hit a "big audience" but "it doesn't compel them to get up and do anything" unless the advertising is done in conjunction with a specific promotion like the company's "Endless Shrimp" special.

"I don't know about you but in certainly in my house we don't see commercials anymore because we use the DVR to fast forward through the shows we are trying to watch," he said.

Griffin's 24-year-old daughter, he said, makes her restaurant choices based on recommendations that her friends give her via social media like Facebook and Snapchat.

"We know more people go to restaurants based on some recommendations they get from a friend of family member rather than anything they see on television," he said.

Red Lobster, which was formerly part of Darden Restaurants, has been run separately since 2014 when it was sold to the San Francisco-based private equity Golden Gate Capital for \$2.1 billion in cash.

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