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Sept. 8, 2006 — For Immediate Release

One thing's clear: Restaurant advertising is easy to understand

Quick-service and casual dining chain ad ratings vary on communicating deals and likeability

SAN CLEMENTE, CALIF. — Quick-service restaurant advertising garners strong consumer ratings on relatively concrete attributes, such as communicating deals, while casual dining restaurant advertising generally scores well on likeability. But both casual dining and quick-service restaurant advertising receives the highest marks on “being easy to understand.”

These findings are gleaned from the *QSR Advertising Attribute Ratings Report – 2006* and *Casual Dining Advertising Attribute Ratings Report – 2006*, supplements to the Quick-Track® and Casual-Track® research programs, respectively. Developed by San Clemente, Calif.-based market research firm Sandelman & Associates, the reports reveal ratings on 10 advertising attributes provided by fast-food and casual dining restaurant customers, who have seen, read or heard advertising for selected chains in the past month.

The reports highlight important differences in consumer perceptions of quick-service and casual dining restaurant advertising. QSR advertising is rated positively on tangible attributes. For example, 68 percent of respondents rate QSR chain advertising excellent or very good on “being easy to understand,” the highest rated attribute. While this was

also the highest-rated attribute for casual dining chains, only 59 percent rate the advertising excellent or very good on that measure. Fully 52 percent give top-two-box ratings to QSR ads on “offering good deals” vs. 46 percent who rate CDR ads excellent or very good on this attribute.

“It seems the quick-service segment is more focused on a quick hit with consumers,” said Roberta Long, senior research analyst at Sandelman & Associates. “First, chains catch viewers’ attention, then communicate clear product and deal information.” QSR ads are also rated higher than casual dining ads on “being unique and distinctive.”

In contrast, casual dining restaurant advertising is rated more highly on “being likeable” (55 percent rate CDR ads excellent or very good, compared with 50 percent for QSR ads). According to Long, learning about deals and other new information may be less critical to casual dining users. As a result, advertisers might have more freedom to employ “feel-good” brand advertising to create a bond or reinforce the brand’s positioning, which might result in visitation.

Ad wars

So who has the highest-rated quick-service restaurant ads? The overall leader is Subway, rated excellent or very good overall by 68 percent of QSR users. McDonald’s ads are the highest rated on “being easy to understand,” while Jack in the Box’s advertising is top-rated on “being unique and distinctive” and “providing new information.” Little Caesars is the highest rated chain on “offering good deals.”

When it comes to casual dining chain advertising, Red Lobster is rated No. 1 overall, while advertising for Outback Steakhouse is seen as the most unique. Olive Garden’s advertising is rated well on many of the key attributes.

How do consumers perceive restaurant chain advertising? What’s working and not working for the casual and quick-service restaurant chains? Whose advertising ratings have improved and whose ratings have slipped over time? Answers to these questions

and more can be found in the *QSR Advertising Attribute Ratings Report – 2006* and *Casual Dining Advertising Attribute Ratings Report – 2006*.

About the Reports

The *QSR Advertising Attribute Ratings Report – 2006* is a supplement to Sandelman & Associates' National Quick-Track[®] study, based on the opinions of 1,200 nationally representative QSR users over the period January to June 2006. A total of 24 quick-service restaurant chains' advertising is rated by QSR users who have seen their advertising in the past month. This study also was conducted in fall 2002 and spring 2001; trend information is included in the 2006 report.

The *Casual Dining Advertising Attribute Ratings Report – 2006* is a supplement to Sandelman & Associates' National Casual-Track[®] study over the period January to June 2006, based on the opinions of 500 nationally representative casual and family dining restaurant users. Nine casual and family dining restaurant chains' advertising is rated by segment users who have seen the chains' advertising in the past month. This study also was conducted in January to June 2003 and trend information is included in the 2006 report.

Sandelman & Associates is a San Clemente, Calif.-based independent research company that provides the restaurant industry with reliable and easy-to-use consumer feedback.

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