

Thanks for Sharing

Le Pain Quotidien connects with consumers and community businesses

by SUSAN REDA, EDITOR

Erin Pepper believes in the power of community and the value of relationship building.

While that would seem a prerequisite for working at Le Pain Quotidien, where communal tables are a centerpiece of the privately held bakery/restaurant's atmosphere, it's an outlook that fits neatly with the company's approach to social media.

"We're part of a community, part of a neighborhood, and as such we need to be part of the conversation," says Pepper, director of guest relations and marketing at LPQ, a New York-based company that operates more than 200 locations on five continents. "We're very active on social media and fortunate to be the beneficiary of all those folks who take pictures of their food and their experience and share them. Instagram has become the 'it' child of the visual world, and social media — in all its various forms — has really become the new word of mouth."

Pepper's attitude about community and relationship-building extends beyond LPQ — in addition to using social media to promote new locations, they also use it to promote new businesses that open near existing locations.

"When several businesses participate in social media within a shopping center or a neighborhood, it [fosters] a sense of community and helps to nurture a fun environment," she says.

BUILDING BRIDGES

That makes LPQ and Regency Centers perfect partners. With some 322 shopping centers across the United States, Regency's marketing and communications team has spent the bet-

ter part of the last few years turning up the volume on digital media. Jan Hanak, senior manager of marketing and design, and Eric Davidson, communications manager, helped champion the company's push. "Five years ago our approach was more reactive," Hanak says. "Today, we believe traditional and digital media need to support each other.

"Regency builds physical spaces where people come together. We use digital marketing to build a bridge that connects our tenants to the shoppers and creates a gathering space," he says. "We succeed when our tenants succeed."

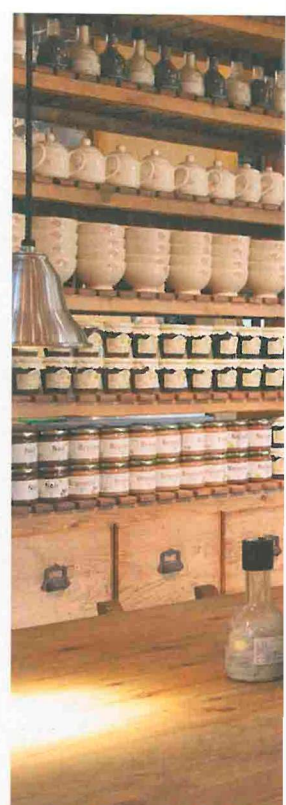
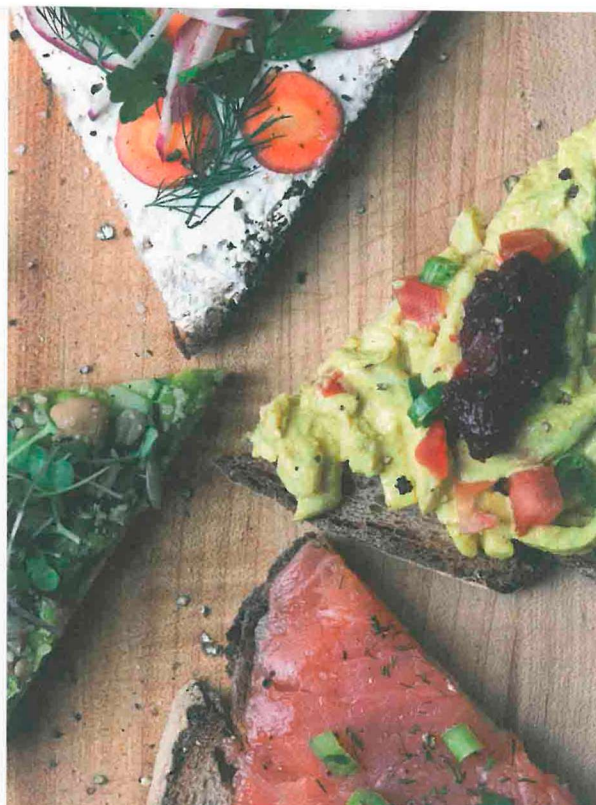
"We're talking to a broader audience than we did in the past," Davidson says. "Businesses need to be where their customers are — and they're on social media. They're using digital to discover and to learn before they head out to shop. Our objective is to tell Regency's story in concert with our retail tenants. We want to be sure local shoppers are aware of our brand and of the great mix of tenants in our centers. And when a new retailer signs a lease, we pull out all the stops to spread the word."

Every Regency project is somewhat unique; cities — even neighborhoods

— have different demographics. Still, a typical Regency Center has a grocery anchor and is located in a high-income, densely populated area. While the mall developer works with highly recognizable retailers like Whole Foods Market, Trader Joe's and Wegmans, the rest of the tenant mix often consists of best-in-class regional operators and local businesses that have a dedicated following.

One of the best examples of Regency's approach is the ongoing marketing and brand building strategy at Brooklyn Station on Riverside, a new center in Jacksonville, Fla. With programs that originated at the genesis of the project, the marketing and communications team endeavored to create a sense of place through the center's naming and branding. Connecting with the community via both traditional and new media, the team worked to create goodwill, excitement and a sense of ownership.

When Brooklyn Station anchor The Fresh Market was preparing to open, marketing and communications relied heavily on Facebook and Instagram to spark excitement. Newsworthy events were posted in an effort to strengthen the brand and raise awareness, hashtags were tacked on to make the





posts more “findable” by users and fans were encouraged to “share.”

While it’s difficult to draw a straight line between traditional and digital media efforts and early results, The Fresh Market reported that the grand opening at Brooklyn Station exceeded expectations — as did first-day sales.

SPEAKING COLLABORATIVELY

“There are aspects of digital media that are qualitative and others that are quantitative, but measuring the overall return on investment can be challenging,” says Davidson.

“The good feeling aspect is an important element — along with sentiment and engagement,” Hanak adds. “Sometimes it just comes down to what are people saying and sharing, because trying to track digital media to conversions is not clearcut.”

One of the more tangible indicators of the buzz the Regency team has managed to create for its centers is the positive effect it’s having on leasing. Highly sought-after retail operation Marilyn Monroe Spas recently signed on at Brooklyn Station, joining a handful of other locations currently open in Beverly Hills, Los Angeles and Miami.

Pepper keeps a close eye on numbers, but ultimately focuses on the big picture.

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— Erin Pepper, Le Pain Quotidien

“It’s basically free marketing ... It’s a chance to reach people that we otherwise might not have exposure to, unless we paid for a full-page print ad.”

Margaret Reinig, LPQ communications manager, agrees. “We live in an increasingly digital world and our guests choose to engage with us online ... They want to incorporate us in their Instagram feeds. We’re delivering our content in such a way that it shouldn’t feel intrusive for the guest. In fact, it’s the best way to market to this generation.”

LPQ is a new Regency tenant but is already noticing the developer’s commitment. “The team at Regency is involved and supportive,” Pepper says. “They’re quick to share posts and were completely supportive during our new store opening.”

Hanak says that Facebook has been the most successful social medium for Regency. “We experiment with all facets of digital media. Often what we use is contingent on what we’re looking to accomplish. We look at the audience, the time of day and other factors when we’re making decisions. We might use Facebook and Twitter to get the word out about something, but there’s no substitute for user-based tools at an event. Once shoppers start posting about something going on at one of our centers, we see a big lift.”

Davidson points out that some of the most effective efforts have been work they’ve done in concert with their tenants. “We repost a lot of their content and will share it from the shopping center point of view — usually adding our hashtag. We’re not spokespersons for our tenants. We’re collaborators who speak with them,” he says.

That said, they’ve been able to simplify digital marketing for some of the mom-and-pop shops in Regency Centers. “Smaller retail businesses don’t have the time to create an editorial calendar and write presentations. In these instances, we’ll work closely with them to help push out messages.” **STORES**