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THE INSTAGRAMMABLE EVENT WHERE MILLENNIALS ACTUALLY ENGAGE WITH BRANDS

INTERACTIVE, SOCIAL MEDIA-FRIENDLY FOOD EVENTS HAVE HIT A SWEET SPOT WITH YOUNG CONSUMERS, OPENING UP NEW AND PLAYFUL WAYS FOR BRANDS TO GET IN FRONT OF THE COVETED DEMO...

Social media has flipped the food and beverage industry on its head, influencing everything from restaurant design (monochrome paint is a must-have) to what the products being served up look like. Perhaps nowhere is this trend more prominent than in the dessert world, where what you eat is already a Treat Yo'Self moment—so why not pay extra for something you can share on social media? It comes as no surprise then that "elaborate/unique desserts" made our list of the biggest food trends Gen Z & Millennials are interested in, along with "black/charcoal desserts," and "rolled ice cream"—all extremely 'grammable creations.

Meanwhile, Instagrammable events continue to attract Gen Z & Millennials looking for interactive experiences with a side of sharable social moments. The popularity of photo-op-ready spaces like the Museum of Ice Cream, Refinery29's 29Rooms, and The Color Factory has spawned an entire industry of events that are "like Disneyland for the Instagram set," reports Fast Company. And food-focused events are especially popular—ahem, Museum of Pizza, Egg House, and Cheat Day Land. And the must-mention of the scene: The Museum of Ice Cream, which dipped into young consumers' love of dessert for their mega-hit marketing activations. But these events are more about taking pics in piles of sprinkles than actually eating anything.

Enter Dessert Goals. The "reimagined food festival" actually hit the scene *before* the Museum of Ice Cream, in June of 2016, and put the focus on being the ultimate Cheat Day for visitors. In other words, they actually have food, and lots of it. Not only does the almost-too-Millennial-to-be-true event invite local vendors known for their unique creations (mochi, cotton candy, etc.) but they team up with brands for unique activations. For instance, at their first-ever 21-and-over event, Dessert Goals at Night, Bailey's served up custom cocktails and alcohol-infused donuts. And they don't just work with food brands, counting Macy's, Netflix, and Brooklinen among their many partners.

We spoke to Miraya Burke, one of the founders of Dessert Goals, about how her and co-founder Liang Shi turned a DIY-decorated event into a brand with six events under its belt and 29,000 Instagram followers through strategic partnerships and social media-fueled marketing. Plus, we got the inside scoop (sorry) on which dessert trends are on the rise:

What inspired the creation of Dessert Goals?
Over the summer of 2016, my friend Liang Shi and I realized there was a festival in New York for everything, from burgers to vintage, yet there wasn't yet one for desserts. My background in event planning and Liang's in design seemed the perfect combo to create a beautiful, fun, and well-designed experience.

Who attends Dessert Goals? What audience is the event targeted at?
The attendees of Dessert Goals are primarily Millennials. As we have grown the event, we are also promoting to families and offering free admission for children six-and-under with ticketed

adults.

How does Dessert Goals build hype for their events? How do you leverage social media?
Our Facebook event has been one of the most helpful social media tools to hype the event. Friends invite friends and our events grow. On our Instagram @omgdessertgoals, we showcase vendors of our events with photography we take for each festival. For our first festival, we started the hashtag #omgdessertgoals which has been used over 12,000 times all over the world.

Did the Museum of Ice Cream and other Instagrammable events made for Millennials influence Dessert Goals?
The Instagrammable events are obviously super popular, and we think their trendiness has definitely helped the festival because of the great photography potential, but beyond that, it's a celebration of local businesses. Each festival, we feature over 20 local dessert vendors and create an opportunity for great exposure and collaboration. The dessert vendors are truly artists—we create the experience for their work to shine.

Dessert Goals introduced the 21+ event Dessert Goals at Night this year. Why?
We have an amazing community of attendees, many who have attended all five of the New York festivals, and we wanted to create a new experience for them to celebrate desserts. During the day, we've always wanted to create an all-ages experience, so we thought a 21+ version would be a fun twist. We're excited to be partnering with Baileys and featuring specialty dessert cocktails and boozy desserts.

Can you talk about how the event partners with brands?
Partnering with brands allows us to create bigger activations and enhance the attendee experience. With partnerships, we can give away free treats to everyone, host giveaways, and build out beautiful backdrops. Our first festival was very DIY and we made all the decorations; as we grow the event and bring more brands on as partners, we're able to take our decorations to a new level.

Is there a particular brand partnership you can tell us about?
For our March festival, we partnered up with Red Vines + Sour Punch to support our candy bar. All attendees received samples of candy from both brands at a styled candy bar. We also built out an immersive candy photo activation, turning the candy into art. We encouraged attendees to share photos on social media by giving away one 30lb box of candy to a lucky winner who tags a photo at the end of the weekend. Red Vines + Sour Punch are a perfect partner for Dessert Goals as they are both nostalgic candy brands that make you feel like a kid, which is really the vibe of the festival.

Are non-food & beverage brands interested in advertising at a food-based event? Why?
Yes; we've worked with a range of non-food brands such as Macy's, Brooklinen, Joy, Netflix, Planoly, and more. For each of our events, we only partner with a small selection of brands, so each partnership really shines. At other event sponsorship opportunities, brands are one of many and could get lost in the noise, but at Dessert Goals we work closely with each brand to create maximum impact.

Do you think treating yourself to dessert is a kind of self-care?
For many people, food is definitely a form of self-care. Life is exhausting and the goal of Dessert Goals is to create an experience for you to look forward to. It's a day around discovery, indulgence, and fun.

At a time when health and wellness are bigger than ever, how has young people's mentality towards indulging in high-calorie foods changed?
We say Dessert Goals is the "ultimate cheat day." It's all about balance and moderation, but

it's okay to ignore the rules for a few hours and just enjoy! Also, we do curate our vendors to incorporate vegan and gluten-free dessert options to accommodate dietary needs.

What are the next food trends you predict will take off?
Desserts with faces seem to be having a moment; many of our vendors are doing this, such as Rebecca's Cake Pops, Stax unicorn cake, and Stache of Goods macarons. I've seen a lot of this trend in Asia and think it's getting bigger in U.S. markets now. Desserts that can be hand-held are Instagrammable and the vendors are starting to focus more on designing beautiful and branded containers.

What's next for Dessert Goals? And for your own career?
I have taken over Dessert Goals as CEO and look forward to expanding the experience. I hope to bring Dessert Goals to a new city this year as well as pop-up and partner events. In addition to Dessert Goals, this year I'm launching Rom Com Fest, a romantic comedy film festival in Los Angeles. From Dessert Goals I have seen the joy of gathering attendees for these feel-good experiences and plan to create a similarly fun festival with rom coms as the focus. Desserts will also play a big part since desserts and rom coms are the perfect pair.

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