

2008 NSS Conference: Breakfast Presentation

Speaker: Danielle Medina

Wednesday June 4, 2008, 08:00 – 08:15 a.m.

I will not approach my presentation this morning from an academic point of view but rather tell you my experience as an entrepreneur and owner of a quality assurance company. Hopefully through our experiences throughout the last 28 years you will be able to recognize the possibilities we all have to apply the principles of Develop, Manage and Certify safety and quality standards. Medina was created September 10 1980. It was built out of dreams out of a strong belief and determination that despite all odds I was going to make a difference and a significant contribution to my country and more importantly to people's well being. I believed that one can create a company which would influence food product quality and safety and provide consumers a Brand they can trust. I decided to take the risk. The company name was to be our family name "Medina" showing a personal commitment to our cause. We made it our mission to care for and improve the health and well being of food consumers.

By working with food providers to Develop, Manage and Certify an effective user friendly and efficient quality food safety program Medina wanted to:

1. Makes every effort to diminish the chances of providing food products that are a health risk to the food consumer
2. Strengthen, promote and protect the food providers brand and the food consumer's satisfaction.
3. To base our standard on up-to-date scientific and regulatory knowledge, independent research and objective consistent third party audit methodology and
4. Drive our programs by principles of professional integrity, universal accessibility and moral responsibility to food consumers

I believed that Medina would be the symbol of quality of ethical approach in food product and menu development. I was not sure where to start but at least I had a mission. One day sitting in a park I looked up and saw a plane. I thought that could be my first start. If I could have a Medina menu in flight I would reach millions of people, which could learn about our quality brand I understood later on that the real name of this approach was captive audience. I made a proposal to Air Canada for the development of a new type of menu which would demonstrate that the airline truly cares for its passengers well being. It was called Nutri Cuisine Medina certify it meant a menu based on a Question of Balance between nutrition, good taste and food safety.

I succeeded to convince the CEO of Air Canada that a Canadian airline is the best platform to show the quality of our Canadian food products and cuisine. This project won 4 International awards and Medina Quality Assurance was born making us a quality company in the promotion of Canadian food products and menu development. As this program was offered in all domestic and international flights around the world, Medina had to develop quality standards, management tools and validation procedures for the application of those standards in every Air Canada catering units around the world.

Our reputation in food products promotion leads us to develop other marketing approach for food products. In 1992 we were asked by Tourism Canada to develop a concept related to aboriginal cuisine. Once again we had to develop recipes which reflected the different aboriginal cultures

across Canada, defines quality standards, chef training programs and finally creates a promotional platform that would transcribe into aboriginal economic development. I decided to tackle Germany where every 4 years there is a Culinary Olympics contest with 14000 chef de cuisine representing every country of the world. Germany is fascinated with our aboriginal culture so through the cuisine we would explain the origins of the culture therefore creating more tourism for those Canadian regions. We won 17 medals for innovation and quality and definitely created enormous economic development opportunities for aboriginal cuisine in Canada. We were able to present this cuisine at many venues such as the G7 summit in Halifax and to the International Environmental meeting in Bahamas hosted by the Canadian Government.

Another project was also developed in conjunction with the Canadian government and the Atlantic provinces in the promotion of Canadian lobster. This promotion was not easy because I discovered that 80% of our lobster export is to USA which in turn goes to Europe as "Maine Lobster". We needed to define a promotional approach which would give confidence to the Canadian lobster industry that we could and should promote directly to European markets the true quality of our Canadian lobster. We did a market analysis and develop quality standards, quality monitoring from fishing to air transportation to food service (we called it the food supply chain quality, safety management program for food export). We decided to tackle France the country of gastronomy known for its best chef de cuisine. I asked Paul Bocuse and 7 major chefs de cuisine to be our spokesperson in the promotion and recognition of our Canadian lobster.

The marketing approach was similar to the French promotion of Beaujolais Nouveau but this time it would be "Lobster Nouveau" certified by Medina. We brought the French chefs to New Brunswick to take part on a fishing trip then return to France to acknowledge and certify that our Canadian lobster product was quality and more importantly that our fishermen were people of quality. The Canadian lobster was delivered directly to France within 24 hours to most restaurants and promoted as a synonymous product of Canadian food quality standards. The success was tremendous and we even were told that the lobster looked so good that it was like a Cartier watch!

Those experiences in addition to the airlines experiences strengthen our Medina brand as a leader in Quality Food Safety Assurance programs. In 1997 we decided to extend our reach to the Caribbean and open an International Business Corporation in Barbados. I was one of the first Canadian women with a small to medium size business to open an IBC under the bilateral agreement between Barbados and Canada. The objective was to become more competitive in light of further expansion in the airlines industry and quality management for food providers. We wanted to extend our food quality assurance program to Latin America and Caribbean markets.

In 2000 we partnered with a major local corporation Barbados Shipping and Trading which was recently sold to another major corporation called Neil and Massey from Trinidad. These steps made Medina a well known quality and food safety service company for food suppliers, supermarket and hotels in the Caribbean. Our involvement as a Canadian company helped Barbados develop legislation in food safety. The Barbados food providers, because of their food safety and quality accreditation were able to sell to cruises and to catering units all across the Caribbean and to other countries such as the USA and England.

The Caricom free trade agreement will command that food products adopt principles of food safety and quality.

It is amazing that Canada through Canadian companies in the Caribbean is helping countries such as Barbados to develop economically by increasing their export capability through quality and food safety standards.

We have conducted over 20 000 audits worldwide in 200 cities. Last year alone Medina's 17 auditors conducted over 400 audits on Inflight kitchens. Despite the fact that catering audits are not always well received by the Inflight caterers it seems that they trust the validity, the quality and honesty of our audits. We are very well respected worldwide for our professional expertise and support we provide.

I am always surprised that our auditors are never afraid to face cultural differences. It seems that the language of the heart and the profound feeling of wanting to make a difference would cross any barriers.

The airline industry has a major responsibility in protecting the well being of passengers and we have truly dedicated staff that travel all over the world to make sure that the caterers, food producers share that responsibility. We were able to make use of technology very early on in our business. As we speak we have auditors which are somewhere in Asia and in Latin America etc...and within 24 hours of the audit completion, the report is sent to our airline client. Due to the enormous demand from the airline to make sure we remain cost efficient we have developed: 4 years ago, a virtual audit called "e-audits" which test and analysis have shown +/- 7% compared to an on-site audits.

As you know application of food safety standards is important but the monitoring related to frequency of audits is of the utmost importance. We found, through research, that 2 validation on site with 3 e-audits (virtual audits) would show the best results in the assurance of consistency and application of food safety and quality standards. We demand that corrective measures be sent within 5 days following the safety audits.

Developing quality and food safety standards in the airline industry was not an easy task. We needed international standards at a time where none were in existence. If I had to audit a kitchen in Montreal, I needed the same approach in Hong Kong. We researched, in collaboration with the International Food Service Association and the International Catering Association, the worldwide commonality of food safety standards. Today, we have an IATA/Medina airline world food safety standard recognized by those associations but more importantly by the International Aviation Transport Association (IATA). Three years ago, Medina became the unique supplier of food safety audits and standard development company for IATA.

We had to standardize the auditing methodology approach for all airlines so that we could audit a kitchen in a specific airport and do so for most airlines which means that they share the cost of audits and audit management. It is a cost efficient, reliable approach called ICQA International Catering Quality Assurance.

Some of our airline clients include Japan airlines, British Airways, Singapore Airlines, Al Nippon, Aeroflot, Air France, KLM and Northwest Airlines. This international organization has over 225 airlines and transportation members and represents a significant growth potential for Medina. We are currently auditing not only caterers of Inflight but also audit food suppliers to caterers. It is a very complex food supply chain. One example I could give you is the food safety problem we had a year ago on the e-coli related to lettuce and spinach from California. It led us to take out those products from our menus until we had assurance that the food safety issue was under control. We were asked by a California group to develop a supply chain standard from the farm to the point of service. Some major Canadian fast food outlets were dependent on the safety of

these products. We completed the evaluation, developed a methodology and we are currently monitoring its application.

You may think that airlines food is non existent or even not tasty ?

Airline food has its bad reputation however one need to understand its complexity and liability related to the product offering. Whether you buy a sandwich on board or a chocolate bar, it needs to be safe and secure.

As I said at the beginning of my speech I started Medina out of a dream but 28 years later I have developed new dreams and say "why not?" I realized that one needs to give Food a Conscience to make people in the supply chain responsible of people's well being. One needs to acquire a balance between profitability and people's health.

We need to give back trust in our food quality and safety to the customers and maybe only then we will avoid the current food crisis that we are now experiencing.

Canada is known to be a country of quality. Wherever you go and whoever you meet if you say "I am Canadian" you will receive admiration and respect. So, whenever we sell our food products, our quality and safety expertise we must remember that a large part of it is made of our Canadian soul. It should be promoted with pride and confidence. We should explore new markets, take the risk and trust ourselves that we will succeed.

I am truly impressed at the work of the Standards Council of Canada and of all the affiliated companies.

Thank you for asking me to be a speaker today.