

Cafeteria Chronicles: Marketing Your School Nutrition Program with Food Photography

Your staff works hard every day preparing delicious, nutritious meals for students – don't let their efforts go unnoticed! With so many food options out there, schools are looking for creative ways to promote and elevate their school nutrition programs. One of the easiest ways to do it? Food photography. A few well-taken photos can go a long way: they're perfect for social media, newsletters, board reports, and presentations, and they also help your team feel proud of the incredible meals they're making.

Think you need to be a professional photographer to get started? Think again! Capturing great food photos is easier than you think. We spoke with Marlon Gordon, Founder and CEO of NxtGen Network, and Melissa Santell, a food photographer and brand consultant, who both shared simple, practical tips for capturing photos that let your meals – and your team's hard work – shine.

Listen to the tips in this [video](#).

Top Tips for Taking Great Food Photos:

1. **Find the best lighting.** Melissa Santell suggests investing in an inexpensive light box to give you control over your lighting. Whether you're taking photos in your office, on the hot line, or in the serving area, a light box provides a consistent light source which is a must for any food photo. If you can't use a light box, natural light works, too. "If you don't have the opportunity to have a perfect condition for lighting like [the light box] and you only have natural light, then find the nearest window, make the best out of the situation," suggests Santell.
2. **Use a tray that helps your food pop.** Your cafeteria may use Styrofoam or paper, but that doesn't mean you're limited to those options for your photos. Choose a tray that photographs well – bright colors or even your school's colors can help your photo stand out!
3. **Make the food look appealing.** It may sound obvious, but a great photo starts with a great-looking tray. Style the entree with colorful sides from that day's menu and arrange the food neatly on your tray. If the food is meant to be hot, make sure it is – you want your photo to capture all the delicious-looking details, like the melty cheese on your pizza.
4. **Style around the tray.** Adding styling elements around the tray can create visual interest. Santell says, "Don't be afraid to move things around and even have

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some things outside of the tray. At the end of the day, we want these shots to be really fun and engaging."

5. **Take your photo.** Experiment with the camera modes on your phone until you find what you like. Take a few shots so you have options to choose from.
6. **Edit your photo.** Now that you've taken your photo, it's time to edit! You can do this right on your phone using a variety of apps. Most have an "auto" feature, but don't be afraid to play around with other editing tools to get the look you want.

In the end, capturing great photos of your school meals isn't just about snapping a picture – it's about showcasing the care and creativity that goes into every tray. "It is so important for us to level up and start marketing and promoting our school meals the same way that restaurants do," says Gordon. And don't forget to have fun with it. "Just like when you were a kid, play around with your food, play around with your camera, make sure that you're experimenting so that you know what you like stylistically. As you do this more and more, the more comfortable that you'll get using your phone as your marketing tool," says Santell. With a little practice and creativity, your photos can help your school meals get the attention they deserve.