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# The Washington Times

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THURSDAY, JANUARY 15, 2004

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## Sports



## Business

Local Domino's owner Frank Meeks serves pizza with a topping of publicity / C8

DOM PAGES  
111

# Cheese sells

## Domino's gimmicks pay off in publicity



Arind Flecken/The Washington Times  
Domino's Pizza on K Street NW is one of 60 locations in the area.

By Donna De Marco  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

**A**ny way you slice it, Frank Meeks knows how to deliver. The owner of 60 Domino's Pizza locations in the Washington area has bombarded television, radio and newspapers locally and nationally for years with off-the-wall antics, political predictions and creative promotions.

As one of Domino's most successful franchisees, Mr. Meeks has mastered not only the art of pizza delivery but also the art of public relations.

"PR is not as important as the quality of pizza and the service, but it gets people's attention," Mr. Meeks said. "It's made Washington, D.C., one of the strongest markets for Domino's Pizza in the world." Mr. Meeks says he is not the sole mastermind behind the publicity or his promotions — including yesterday's gimmick that gave \$3 off a pizza for anyone named Joe, in honor of Joe Gibbs' return as the Washington Redskins head coach.

For 12 years, Mr. Meeks has worked with New York-based Jericho Communications to get his Domino's franchise on the local map. But along the

way, he has received considerable national attention.

"Frank Meeks hired Jericho to do what they do best: Find a creative connection between the Domino's brand and what's happening in popular culture, a connection that resonates and gets people talking," said Tim McIntyre, vice president of communications for Domino's Pizza in Ann Arbor, Mich.

Mr. Meeks' Team Washington has remained one of the strongest and well-respected franchises in the system, Mr. McIntyre said.

"Pizza is a top-of-mind, often spontaneous and indulgent purchase decision," he said. "For people to order from you, they have to be thinking about you."

Mr. Meeks knows publicity translates into bigger sales. During a four-year period, when Mr. Meeks was not working with Jericho and did only some publicity, sales were flat. When he rehired the agency three months ago, sales rose and the level of publicity soared.

Last month, Team Washington released the results

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Frank Meeks, who owns several Domino's in Washington, gave \$3 off a pizza to anyone named Joe in honor of Joe Gibbs' return to the Redskins.



# MEEKS

From page C8

of the latest Pizza Meter — an unscientific poll that takes a look into the relationship between pizza orders and events and people worldwide. For instance, the Pizza Meter found hotel heiress Paris Hilton was the top fake name used for pizza orders in 2003, and the night of Saddam Hussein's capture was the biggest tipping night of the year.

After its release, the quirky results were mentioned on national broadcasts such as NBC's "Today" show and "Late Night With Conan O'Brien," and on cable networks such as CNN

and Fox News, along with publications across the country.

"To me nothing is too outrageous if it fits into the brand's personality," said Eric Yaverbaum, Jericho's president and co-founder. "We have to stay within the brand perimeter and make an emotional connection."

Team Washington introduced the Pizza Meter in the early 1990s and predicted when the Persian Gulf War was going to start based on the significant increase in late-night deliveries to the White House.

Each Domino's franchisee must pay a national advertising fee of 5.5 percent of its sales. Mr. Meeks, who will not disclose annual sales, spends about 7 percent of sales on advertising.

Mr. Meeks opened the first Domino's in the area in 1983 on Duke Street in Alexandria. To get the word out about his unknown business, he hired Jericho, which then was based in Washington.

Mr. Meeks, with a limited advertising budget, hoped the agency would get him on local TV, but Jericho was thinking bigger.

In fact, Jericho's creativity landed Mr. Meeks a five-minute segment on the "Today" show in April 1987.

The focus was the Mississippi native's unique managerial style: Instead of a regular weekly business meeting, Mr. Meeks held a pep rally, followed by a 10K run with the company's

managers trying to promote health among his employees.

And that was just the beginning.

Team Washington received local and national attention for many of its creative stunts.

"We want to make a brand fun and drive a lot of traffic," Mr. Yaverbaum said. "We want to bring the brand a personality."

The zanier the idea, the better: From promoting Domino's World's Fastest Pizza Maker — who for seven years came from Team Washington — to rewarding procrastinating taxpayers with pizza as they wait in line at a D.C. post office April 15.

"I'm not doing this to make Frank Meeks a star," Mr. Meeks said. "I just want to sell pizza."