



Demand for cup cakes has remained strong despite the economic downturn.

Photo: MICHEL O'SULLIVAN

Let them eat cup cake

Jacqueline Maley

It is petite, well priced and sweet, and has proved one of the unlikeliest recession-proof commodities.

The humble cup cake, the little battler of baking, has apparently not suffered at all during the economic slump that has resulted in retail spending falling by 1 per cent in the past year.

"We've doubled in size almost every year since we began," said Alex Perry, co-owner of the Cupcake Bakery, which has three stores in Sydney and two in Melbourne.

"We saw the success of cup cakes in New York, namely from the *Sex and the City* show, and we decided to do it here. We thought: 'Hey, who's not going to like a cup cake?'"

A survey of cup cake vendors shows Mr Perry was not alone in the source of his inspiration.

Many based their business plan on the trendsetting HBO show, which featured a single scene in its third series where two of the main characters devour pink-iced cup

cakes from a New York bakery.

The bakery has since become famous and cup cakes have exploded into a worldwide phenomenon, following on from the bagel trend of the '90s and the US-style iced doughnuts popular earlier this decade.

David Hanna, co-owner of the Cupcake Factory, based in Sydney's Drummoyne, has had to introduce certain "efficiencies" to his business to ride out the credit crisis.

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Cupcake Bakery's Alex Perry

Like many lay people, he once thought "anyone" could knock up a cup cake, but now he takes pride in the quality of his recipes and specialised staff.

"A lot of the other players out there, I think in the tough times, they can go to the pre-mixes and stuff like that," he sniffs.

Paul McDonald, general

manager of the Queensland branch of the Baking Industry Association, believes the reasons for the cup cake boom are emotional, not economic.

"People eat with their eyes," he said. "I think that's a big part of cup cake culture."

My Little Cupcake, founded by Andy Allegaert and Catherine Myers, was based on a "complete visual concept".

"Cath's background was in millinery and lampshade-making and I am an artist. The cup cake was a homey, feel-good product," Mr Allegaert said.

For the time being, profits are strong but Mr Allegaert said the trendy nature of the cup cake business "has always been in the back of my mind".

Young Sung, owner of the Cupcakes on Pitt franchise, is one step ahead. The former American resident said that in the US, the next big thing would be macaroons.

The Baking Industry Association predicts the same trend, except they prefer the French word macaron. They call it the "diva of the baking world".