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Grab & Go

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Trends and Countertrends Captivate Today's Shoppers



By Sharon Olson

Understanding trends can feel like trying to hit a moving target. New research by Culinary Visions sheds light on trends and countertrends identified in a nationwide study of over 2,100 consumers. The study found the hectic pace of modern life requires fast fuel as much as personal service and social food-centric experiences.

Gaining an understanding of these trends at play in the marketplace can help retailers satisfy and delight today's shoppers, who seem to want it all when it comes to food.

What emerged from this inquiry was awareness of the force of cultural contradictions in driving the trends. For many major trends identified, equally powerful countertrends emerged. The research identified three important insights for retailers:

1. FAST FUELING AND TAKING TIME TO SOCIALIZE

Pandemic-weary consumers have returned with enthusiasm to immersive experiences, such as food festivals, street markets and fancy food emporiums where food is both the attraction and the entertainment. Seventy-one percent of those surveyed in the recent study said they enjoy a food market experience because it is just as much a social occasion as it is a shopping trip.

The volume of commitments in everyday life is also making fast fueling an important part of today's lifestyle. Fifty-seven percent of survey participants said sharing a meal with a friend or family members in the car suits their hectic lifestyle.

Although consumers continue to embrace technology that enables shopping with ease, in-store experiences can create the excitement and appeal of a food market and draw customers back in-store.

2. GETTING FACTS ON DEMAND AND LEARNING FROM EXPERTS

Food savvy consumers want to know as much as they can about the food they consume, and that goes beyond required ingredient statements on packaged goods. Technology that makes information easily accessible at the point of sale can encourage purchases in deli departments as well.

When it comes to food, a flavor experience can make all the difference. Eighty-six percent of those surveyed said they enjoyed sampling products when shopping for groceries. Sampling in the deli department can go beyond offering a taste that assures flavor and freshness by serving up a quick meal idea. It also offers a cross-merchandising opportunity for the store.

There is growing appreciation of employees who

have expert knowledge of the items in the department. Seventy-two percent of survey participants said that experts available to answer questions on specific food items made them feel like it was worth the trip to the store.

3. APPRECIATING LOCAL AND EXPLORING THE WORLD

The desire and willingness to pay for local and sustainable foods has become a mega-trend and a boon for the deli department. Survey participants expressed an appreciation for everyone involved in bringing their food to the table.

Furthermore, 77% said they are willing to pay more for food that comes from local producers. Having the opportunity to meet the producer adds to the appeal. Seventy-five percent of consumers surveyed said they like talking to food vendors who are passionate about the products they sell.

While local foods have a powerful appeal, international foods and flavors are also enticing. Even though global travel has been dampened in recent years, many countries are promoting their culture around the world with culinary diplomacy programs that introduce new foods to consumers.

Eighty-three percent of consumers in this survey said they enjoy exploring new cultures through food. Modern consumers have a powerful sense of culinary adventure when it comes to exploring global foods.

TRANSLATING THE TREND RESEARCH

Trends are multidimensional, and food trends must be viewed from a broad perspective. For this study, the Culinary Visions research team collected insight from a wide range of experts working in varied creative disciplines that are important to modern consumer lifestyles. In addition to food and culinary professionals, kitchen designers, architects, fashion designers and fine artists are among those who contributed ideas that drove the direction of this consumer study.

There is no one-size-fits-all formula when it comes to creating a destination department. The interests and desires of local communities assure relevance when consumers have a wide range of alternatives.

In today's food culture, trends and countertrends both have the power to influence the decision-making process. Success may require pushing boundaries just enough to captivate customers with something new.

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Grab-and-Go

Cashing in means knowing what customers want, when and how.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Grab-and-go, the practice of grabbing ready-prepared food to go and eat, isn't new. In fact, this concept is a century-plus old.

Ask grandparents, or great-grandparents, who grew up in Philadelphia or New York in the early 20th century, and they'll tell you with a kid-in-a-candy-shop delight about visiting a Horn & Hardart automat.

Walk along a wall of glass-windowed slots, each filled with single-serve restaurant-quality selections like sandwiches, soups and sliced pie. Make one selection or several mix-and-match for a full meal. Then, insert a coin to open the door, grab the food and go to a nearby table to eat.

Want seconds? Staff in the back almost like magic continuously filled the slots with fresh food.

Today, the essence of grab-and-go is the same. Shoppers want fresh, high-quality food and fast. They want to see their selections. They want to be able to customize to satisfy all family members. And if everything is all in one place, either plated or pre-packaged, and perhaps bundled as part of a special price promotion, all the better.

"Grab-and-go is one of the fastest growing categories for us and the industry," says Hannah Herring, media relations manager for Publix Super Markets, Inc., a 1,300-plus-store chain headquartered in Lakeland, FL. "Over the last 10 years, this growth has accelerated as customers increasingly value their time. Busy lifestyles have created time-starved consumers, and they look for ways to save time. One easy target is the time spent preparing daily meals. Additionally, customers now attach more meaning to their meals than just lunch and dinner. They like to have more interesting, unique, robust and bold flavors. Our grab-and-go case offers a variety of categories such as leafy salads, specialty salads, sandwiches, entrées, meals and sides. Each category offers classic



PHOTO COURTESY OLLI SALUMERIA

items, customer favorites, and new, trendy and interesting items."

What is different with the grab-and-go customer today versus the automat diner of yesteryear is indeed what they want, as well as when they want to eat it and how they want to buy it. This is especially true when they shop at the supermarket deli and prepared foods department.

WHAT CUSTOMERS WANT

Know your customer when creating or recreating a register-ringing grab-and-go program in the supermarket deli and prepared foods departments.

"Start with data specific to your store(s) and region," recommends Anne Nelson, senior manager for deli brand and strategy for Reser's Fine Foods, in Beaverton, OR. "Do shoppers buy fried chicken just before a weekend? If so, align your grab-and-go products accordingly. Do younger shoppers buy only for the next meal or two while families shop for the whole week? If so, make sure you have a variety of grab-and-go sizes for all audiences."

For a broader perspective, Whitney Atkins, vice president of the International Dairy Deli Bakery Association (IDDBA), in

Madison, WI, recommends gaining an understanding of the five generations of shoppers, from traditionalists of the Silent Generation to digital natives of Gen Z.

"This is vital for grab-and-go convenience. In 2019, the number of Millennials surpassed the number of Boomers. By 2028, Gen X will surpass the number of Boomers, meaning the number of households led by people under 40 will outweigh the amount over 40."

Foods with a focus on healthier preparation appealed to two-thirds (66%) of shoppers in 2022, up from 58% the year prior, according to the *Power of Foodservice at Retail 2022*, by FMI-The Food Industry Association, in Arlington, VA.

"Customers are looking for grab-and-go convenience plus something that has the nutritional specs they desire in a hurry," says Laura Morris, associate marketing director for Kayco Beyond division, in Bayonne, NJ, distributor of Beetology, Wonder Melon and Wonder Lemon brand cold-pressed juices — products which easily pair with other grab-and-go deli foods like salads and sandwiches for an added ring.

"We have three varieties because of the increased popularity of better-for-you

beverages,” she says. “They can be promoted on the shelf with a deal of buy one, get one 50% off, or have IRCs hanging for a quick money save.”

By sub-category, grab-and-go and pre-packaged deli meat and cheese have been outgrowing service meat and cheese for several years, with the former rising from 28.6% of dollars in 2017 to 44.7% in 2022, says Anne-Marie Roerink, principal and founder of 210 Analytics, LLC, in San Antonio, TX.

“The biggest challenge for deli operators is navigating the public perception of salami and other deli meats as unhealthy — even if that isn’t necessarily true,” says Oliviero Colmignoli, president and founder of Oceanside, CA-based Olli Salumeria, which recently introduced its grab-and-go Olli Salamini line of bite-sized salami sticks, which offer 2.6 ounces of bite-sized salami in a resealable bag and bold flavors like Smoked, Pequin, Bourbon and Classic. “Our newest preservative-free formula eliminates all added nitrates and nitrites, a revolutionary step in modern salami-making and the deli category as a whole.”

In deli prepared foods, demand in grab-and-go is for healthy plant-based items and globally inspired flavors, says Carl Cappelli, senior vice president of sales and business development for Don’s Prepared Foods, in Schwenksville, PA. “Our grains, sides and Better Bowls are a perfect fit for retail deli, which overall is projected to grow by 10%-plus in 2023. We offer some of our traditional salads in pre-packed cups, but the best path forward is for retailers to buy in bulk. Retailers build their brand equity by providing their grab-and-go cups made in-store and offering cool, healthy and unique items.”



PHOTO COURTESY/PUBLIX SUPERMARKETS, INC.

The company’s offerings include grains like Mango Lime Quinoa Salad, sides such as Korean BBQ Green Beans, and Better Bowls like Plant-Based Burrito Bowl with vegan chicken.

As for global flavors, 83% of consumers surveyed in Culinary Vision research said they enjoy exploring new cultures through food, according to Sharon Olson, president of Chicago, IL-headquartered Olson Communications and executive director of the Culinary Visions Panel and Y-Pulse. “Our research also shows that 83% of consumers surveyed said they consider themselves to be adventurous eaters, thus offering a flavorful twist is a good way delis can build their grab-and-go business.”

Tuscanini, a brand of authentic made-in-Italy foods distributed in the U.S. by Kayco, recently introduced its Tuscanini Reserve single-sauce cheese pizzas, which include Margherita and Supermargherita flavors.

“Make these products available in the

frozen grab-and-go section of delis and supermarkets with a call out on the key benefits of authenticity,” suggests Shani Seidman, chief marketing officer of Kayco.

WHEN THEY WANT IT

The prevalence of snacking, the practice of family dinners and the popularity of entertaining at home are all ripe opportunities for grab-and-go.

“Consumers have embraced multiple snacking occasions throughout the day,” says Carlee Corvino, associate brand manager for FrieslandCampina, with U.S. headquarters in Paramus, NJ, on behalf of the Royal Hollandia brand of cheese. “We have introduced our new Royal Hollandia snack bags. The product line offers three different flavor varieties, Mild Gouda, Smoke Flavor Gouda and Chili Flavor Gouda, that pair well with fruit, nuts or pre-packed cured meat slices. This provides an elevated snacking option with little to no effort when shopping the deli.”

GIVE YOUR GRAB-AND-GO A THEME

Themes are an excellent way to spotlight opportunities and offer solutions via destinations with a mix of grab-and-go items.

In the summer, create a grab-and-go barbecue display filled with family favorites including baked beans, rolls, barbecue sauce, ribs, seasoning and utensils, suggests Anne Nelson, senior manager for deli brand and strategy for Reser’s Fine Foods, in Beaverton, OR.

Also, be sure to include summer promotions that make camping a breeze

with hot dogs, coleslaw, s’mores ingredient packs, dips and crackers. Stack charcoal and lighter fluid nearby.

In August and September, make it about back-to-school and lunchbox fixings, Nelson adds. “Grab-and-go displays that include single-serve and multipack sizes of deli salads, puddings, crackers and tortilla roll-ups, are an ideal grocery assist for busy shoppers. Our newest grab-and-go item is our rotisserie chicken salad, with 3-ounce cups in a 4-pack. With the

growth of protein across the category and consumers’ need for versatility as they approach meals, it made sense to take a top-selling product and reconfigure package format to meet the current needs of consumers.”

In the fall, when families are back to work, school and a regular meal routine, tap into cooking trends like consumers’ eager purchase of small kitchen appliances like air fryers, slow cookers, InstaPots and panini makers.

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