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10 Ways To Score An A-Plus In Sales At Back-To-School Time



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COVER STORY



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DELI BUSINESS (ISSN 1088-7059) is published by Phoenix Media Network, Inc., P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to DELI BUSINESS, P.O. Box 810217, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0217

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PHOENIX MEDIA NETWORK, INC.
P.O. BOX 810425,
BOCA RATON, FL 33481-0425
PHONE: 561-994-1118 FAX: 561-994-1610
www.delibusiness.com
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BEST IN SHOW WINNIMERE BY JASPER HILL FARM



The winner of this year's 2013 American Cheese Society's Judging & Competition, held in Madison, WI in conjunction with ACS's annual conference was Winnimere, produced by Jasper Hill Farm located in Greensboro, VT. Made from raw Ayrshire cow milk and aged for a minimum of 60 days, Winnimere is a washed-rind cheese that is wrapped in spruce bark from the woods surrounding the farm and washed in a local beer. Availability is limited to the months from January to June.

The American Cheese Society was founded in 1983 to support North American artisan and specialty cheeses. This year's judging included 1794 cheeses from 257 companies.

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Going Green

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Pasta & Sauces
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Fried chicken
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DELI MEATS
All things Pork
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CHEESES
The Art of Affinage
The Netherlands

COMING IN DEC./JAN.

DELI BUSINESS will look into the retail trends that will affect deli retailers in the upcoming year.

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DELI WATCH

New Products



TOASTED RAVIOLI

Rich's Products Corp., St. Simons Island, GA, has introduced Toasted Ravioli, Crispy Dill Pickles and Chili Cheese Bites, which embrace different tastes and traditions from favorite regional flavors around the U.S. Inspired by the iconic St. Louis dish, the four-cheese Toasted Ravioli are made with Mozzarella, Parmesan, Asiago and Romano cheeses and lightly breaded. Crispy Dill Pickles, a version of fried pickles, are round, crunchy kosher dill pickle slices covered in a lightly seasoned breading. Chili Cheese Bites have smooth cheddar cheese and mild chili sauce in each bite.

www.farmrich.com



POLYPROPYLENE CONTAINERS

Anchor Packaging, Inc., St. Louis, MO, has announced the addition of a new 16-ounce polypropylene container and lid designed to maximize performance and minimize cost. Food looks fresh and appealing in this upscale alternative to foam and paper packages. The new M616 offers a table-ready presentation making the new menu items stand out at a price that creates additional profits. Made with renewable mineral additives that reduce the use of petroleum-based polypropylene resin up to 40 percent, this strong and durable, black base is resistant to grease and oils and withstands temperatures up to 230° F.

anchorpac.com



ALL-NATURAL SALAMI

Alef Sausage Co., Mundelein, IL, has added a new line of all-natural sausages to its already extensive assortment of products. The newest salami selections are made with natural meats, freshly-ground spices and natural preservatives, and include a low-fat alternative. The products include All Natural Summer Sausage, an uncured dry salami made with beef, pork and freshly ground all-natural spices; All Natural Dry Turkey Salami, an uncured dry salami made with freshly ground spices that is a lower fat alternative to beef with the same taste. All products are made using high-quality meat, milk, eggs, salt, sugar and fresh spices.

www.alefsausage.com



MELKBUS125 WINTER SEASONAL CHEESE JOINS MELKBUS LINE

Best Cheese Corp., Purchase, NY, has introduced Melkbus125 Winter, a seasonal cheese joining the line of Melkbus raw milk farmer's cheeses. The line contains a mixture of spices that celebrates the flavors and scents of the winter season. With a taste profile of sweet cream and an essence of nutmeg, clove and cardamom, this cheese will hold its own on a cheese plate or can be used for an array of baked dishes, including apple pie and sweet potatoes.

www.coachfarm.com

New Products



HOT WELLS WITH LARGE FLANGE AVAILABLE

Alto-Shaam, Menomonee Falls, WI, has added the Drop-in Hot Wells with Large Flange (HWLF) to match the Cold Well flange profiles for counter-top and décor consistency. Menus can expand to include both hot and cold foods with these units. The HWLFs are available in sizes ranging from a single full-size hotel pan up to five pans wide and accommodate 2-, 4- or 6-inch deep pans. Halo Heat wraps around the food well, radiating from the recessed surface, providing greater ambient surface temperature control.

www.alto-shaam.com

Announcements



BONELESS CHICKEN OPTIONS

Tyson Foods Inc., Springdale, AR, offers Simply Fried Boneless Fried Chicken, providing deli shoppers with the same home-style fried chicken taste they're familiar with and helping retailers capture shopper attention with on-trend chicken concepts that increase impulse purchases. With simple cooking procedures that require nothing more than using existing chicken frying equipment and limited training, grocery store deli managers can produce a consistent product that consumers seek and buy regularly. Available for purchase immediately, master cases contain enough breasts and thighs to complete nine four-piece boxes.

www.tysondeli.com



JEFFS' SELECT WINS SOFI

Caves of Faribault, Faribault, MN, has announced its Jeffs' Select Gouda has won the 2013 sofi Award for Outstanding Cheese or Dairy Product from the Specialty Food Association. A sofi is the top honor in the specialty food industry. "sofi" stands for Specialty Outstanding Food Innovation. Jeffs' Select was one of 125 finalists selected by a national panel of specialty food professionals from a record-setting 2,573 entries across 32 awards categories including Outstanding Chocolate, Confection and Snack Food. Jeffs' Select is the result of a collaborative effort between Jirik and long-time friend Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker Jeff Wideman.

www.faribaultdairy.com



GREAT MIDWEST CHEESE CONTEST

Great Midwest Cheese, Richfield, WI, is inviting home chefs to submit their favorite grilled cheese recipes made using Great Midwest cheeses for a chance to win one of eight prizes. Staying true to the brand's name, the contest's grand prize winner will receive a weekend trip to the "Great Midwest" city of their choice including airfare, hotel accommodations and spending money. Two silver and five bronze tier winners will receive grilled cheese-themed prizes, including Cuisinart Griddler Grills, Griddle & Panini Presses (silver tier winners) and "Grilled Cheese: 50 Recipes to Make You Melt," by Marlena Spieler.

www.GreatMidwestCheese.com

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by Jim Prevora, Editor-in-Chief

Are Delis Missing Out On Serving Children's Needs?

As schools are open once again and parents continue to wrestle with healthy meal plans for their children's lunches and dinners, supermarket delis stand poised to provide solutions and go beyond the traditional routines of selling chicken fingers and discounted bologna.

The role of the service deli is an important one to a retail food store. Not just because it is an important profit center and an important forum for a store to offer differentiated product, but because in an increasingly self-service world, it is still a service department and thus an opportunity for a retailer to make those human-to-human connections that are so crucial to building real relationships with consumers.

The opportunity is real, but often squandered. It is nice that a consumer might enjoy seeing "Sally" or "John" behind the counter and a plus if the associates know "Mrs. Jones" likes her ham sliced extra thin or that "Mr. Smith" comes every Wednesday night direct from his tennis league, but such connections are heavily dependent on associates staying with the company and getting to know these people.

What is really useful is training the staff to express a consistent corporate value and deliver a message that reflects what a retailer stands for. One suspects that speaking out on behalf of healthy and palate-broadening children's lunches might be a great place to start.

The standard approach to back-to-school promotions is to offer discounts—and indeed families with children are often budget-pressed. The problem, of course, is two-fold: First, we have lots of evidence that parents are willing to skimp to get their children the best, and discounting raises the suspicion that the product being offered is not the best. Second, it is tough to build a sustainable competitive advantage on discounting as someone else is typically able to discount just as much or more.

This challenging approach is made worse because the product that is discounted is often product that is associated with kids—chicken fingers, hot dogs, bologna, American cheese, etc.—and these products are neither the healthiest nor the most interesting products in the store.

It is a national tragedy that most restaurants still offer such uninspired children's menus. Chicken fingers and French fries may have their place, but they hardly reach the limits of what appeals to children today. Go into any sushi restaurant, Thai restaurant, Mexican restaurant or any of a diverse array of ethnic eateries and you see children of all ethnicities enjoying diverse fare, many items with richer flavor profiles and more healthful ingredients than the standard children's menu in the United States.

So why are so many of our deli promotions built around a discount on bologna or a buy-one-get-one-free offer on packages of chicken fingers?

Obviously we have to start with offering diverse products, and many supermarkets have the advantage of deli/retail foodservice departments already rich in prepared food items, diverse salad and soup bars and a rich panoply of ethnic cuisines.

Part of the issue is focus: Do we offer small lunchbox-size containers for parents to select hot or cold items off the food bars and put the items in the containers to later drop in a lunchbox? Imagine kids sitting down in school cafeteria with sesame noodles or chicken stir fry packed in small containers within their lunchboxes. Are the pre-made items, such as tuna salad or macaroni and cheese, sold in the right-sized containers for school lunch? Is there a "five pack" option of pre-made items so parents can get appropriate assortments for a week of school lunches?

Yet even if the product and packaging is correct, we still have to sell, and the best way to sell is for retailers to position themselves as really interested in assisting parents to help their children enjoy good food while living a healthy lifestyle.

We all know the tools: Signage, packaging, in-store video, websites, ads, on and on. Yet surely, the single most effective tool is people. Associates would likely feel inspired if they understood their job was not merely servicing consumers who want a discount on ham, but to represent the company's deeply held value that the deli department and the store as a whole can play a role in improving the lives of children by getting them delicious, nutritious and healthy food.

My youngest son, Matthew, age 10, is in good shape, but he is a basketball player and wants to be in great shape so, without any suggestion from his parents, he has sworn off deep fried foods. Kids are sophisticated today—they know things at earlier ages than their parents and grandparents did, and they understand the idea of making good choices. He still will only eat things that taste good, but he is open to trying things; he has traveled some and sometimes he stumbles on something delicious.

Why shouldn't his mother stumble on something delicious in the deli department? And, why shouldn't we be working hard to help her find this secret ingredient? **DB**



James J. Prevora

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by Lee Smith, Publisher

Why Cheese?

There has always been a disconnect between mainstream retailers and specialty foods. While Castelvetrano olives were the hot olive of the year a while back, it didn't mean that all supermarket buyers ran out trying to find them for their olive bars. Why? Because, overall, they were not going to significantly raise gross margins or increase sales.

Selling high volumes of cheese, on the other hand, has never been up for debate. The commodity cheeses found in the dairy department, including shreds, slices, blocks and string cheeses, have always been good sellers. But, what's easy in commodities has been problematic in specialties. There is the high cost of inventory, labor and shrink. Every cheese is not suitable for every store, and plan-o-grams are difficult to manage. And, unlike dairy cheeses, specialty cheeses often require trained and passionate employees. In a small store, it may take only one person leaving the company to send shrink soaring.

Specialty cheeses have their own handling requirements by category. Each cheese has its own individual shelf life, names that are hard to pronounce and flavor profiles that range from mild and creamy to stinking and sticky. Unfortunately, most stores just display them together without any signage and customer education, leaving customers to dig through the pile. While the display may be neat and organized in the morning, by dinnertime it is a hodge-podge of cheeses, one on top of the other.

The result is many small and large chains avoid the category. Instead, there is a self-service case with a limited number of varieties supplied pre-cut by a local distributor. And, it only gets worse as the number of varieties increases.

It is operational issues that have prevented most supermarket chains from taking advantage of growth opportunities. Seafood departments, in-store bakeries, sliced-to-order deli meats and prepared foods were all categories that consumers desired, but supermarkets had a tough time with. Now, the little trouble-maker is cheese.

Independent cheese shops, often with full-service restaurants or cafes, are opening at a record pace. Pricing is not a disadvantage due to the thousands of cheeses available and the wide range of quality. Quality differs from cheesemaker to cheesemaker but the real differential is the retail store. Stores (and chains) that do it well win; everybody else loses.

Are there solutions? Yes, but finding solutions will mean putting the customer first and having in-depth knowledge of the category.

For example, do you know what the bestselling category of cheeses in the United States is? The answer is Cheddar. What percentage of your cheeses fall into the Cheddar category? Cheddars should represent at least

25 percent of your cheese case. They are stable cheeses with a long shelf life. Cheddars can be sold from \$5.99 to \$25.99 a pound. There are plain, cloth-bound, natural-rind, blues, flavored and rubbed.

How about Emmentaler and alpine-style cheeses? While not as popular as Cheddar, Swiss-style cheeses are top sellers. Jarlsburg has been a consumer favorite for my entire career. It is a fantastic melting cheese, good on sandwiches, kid-friendly and affordably priced. But it is far from the only cheese within the category that is strong. This is another category that sports world class winners, depth of character and stunning American cheeses. Who hasn't heard of Swiss cheese? Are they prominently displayed in your cases?

Next in line for profitability are the Italian cheeses. Italian cheeses are so well loved by Americans, they have become ubiquitous to cheese shops, restaurants and home refrigerators. Fresh Mozzarella, grating cheeses, Provolone and a host of specialties are appropriate to any retail cheese shop. However, since there are so many commodity-style Italian cheeses sold in dairy departments, reserve space for better quality.

Surprisingly, Goudas have gone from a single-cheese to a category with enough different styles and flavors to warrant its own category. Again, long shelf life, reasonable prices, varied flavors and ages and a broad audience add to the popularity.

All of the above cheeses hold up well to pre-wrapping, have long shelf lives and can stand a bit of rough handling. They range from well known readily available cheeses to high end specialties that can rock even the most sophisticated consumer's world. And, they are available in goat, sheep and cow's milk versions.

Soft-ripened, specifically Brie and Camembert, a good triple-crème and a couple of blues are a necessity for most cheese departments. Add a few fresh and flavored goat cheeses to round out the cheese department.

The last group includes the highly perishable darlings that are getting the most press. They are the small format goat and cow milk cheeses. These varieties are endless. Often they are delicate, but delectable. Be forewarned; they are not for everyone. Carry a small but select variety and change selection frequently. Make sure they are displayed in a way that preserves their integrity. And, most important, dump them before they, quite frankly, become rotten. **DB**



A stylized handwritten signature in black ink.



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10 Ways To Score An A-Plus In Sales At Back-To-School Time

BY CAROL BAREUTHER



‘What’s for lunch?’ is one of the biggest kitchen quandaries for parents across America at back-to-school time

More than 22 million, or nearly 42 percent, of K-12 students in the U.S. did not participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National School Lunch Program (NSLP) during the 2012-2013 school year. Instead, most ate a lunch packed from home.

The 33 million K-12 students who did participate in the NSLP during this period experienced some big changes. Mandates of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 went into effect, which directed the USDA to update the NSLP’s meal pattern

and food choices to reflect the latest Dietary Guidelines for Americans. More specifically, the new meal standards call for both fruits and vegetables in every meal, more whole grain foods and low-fat or fat-free milk products, smaller portions and less saturated fat, trans fat and sodium.

Moms home-packing their kids’ lunches want to make sure these are healthy, too. In fact, ensuring the family eats healthful and nutritious meals was one of the top five challenges voiced by 22- to 56-year-old moms surveyed in the NPD Group’s 2012-published research, *Generation Mom: How Moms Provide and Kids Influ-*

ence Consumption Patterns in the Home.

Here’s where the deli can come to the rescue. Fruits and vegetables, whole grain products and lean dairy and protein foods either are already sold or could be cross-merchandised and sold as meal solutions in the deli.

“Our recent research with kids shows that they like healthy high-quality foods. To kids, healthy equates to fresh and high-quality means mom-made or homemade,” says Sharon Olson, president of Olson Communications and executive director of Y-Pulse, a Chicago, IL-based research and consulting firm. “Kids like real ingredients;



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no fake, artificial or mysterious foods. Kids also love to customize. All of these factors point to opportunity for the deli."

To profitably capitalize on back-to-school time, supermarket delis need to shift the orientation to kids, says John McGuckin, executive vice president for sales at the Colonial Heights, VA-headquartered Sabra Dipping Co.. "There's a huge opportunity to market to kids and push health and wellness that is often overlooked in the deli. To do this requires a new level of creativity, energy and enthusiasm from the top of the chain to execution at store level."

Here are 10 innovative deli promotional ideas for back-to-school.

1. Price Promote Kid-Favorite Fixings Rising food prices and staying on budget are two other of the top five challenges facing moms, according to the NPD group's 2012 research. Tried-and-true merchandising tactics for back-to-school time include offering a price discount on kid-favorite sandwich fixings and snacks.

From July 29 to Sept. 27, Tyson Foods, headquartered in Springdale, AR, is offering promotional coupons where customers can save \$1 when they purchase one pound or more of Wunderbar brand bologna. "In-store rebates are proven to increase sales of more than 50 percent at no cost to our retail customers," says brand manager, T Gill Fuqua. "To call attention, we are offering merchandising materials with a bright schoolhouse creative to remind [parents] that a bologna sandwich is an easy school lunch solution."

This fall, Dominick Frocione, vice president of sales at Cedar's Mediterranean Foods, Inc., based in Haverhill, MA, explains, "We are currently discussing a targeted IRC that can be used on any of our products and would offer a deep discount to our entire line to encourage the first time trial of new items. Our Original Hummus is a great product for a different type of spread that can be either the sole protein or used with deli meats and cheeses. Kids are huge fans of hummus."

2. Spice Up Grab & Go Sandwich Offerings "Kids' tastes are more adventurous today," says Y-Pulse's Olson. According to a 2013-conducted Y-Pulse survey of school foodservice professionals, who were asked their opinion of students consuming ethnic foods in their schools, 58 percent said almost all students expect to see ethnic foods regardless of their ethnic background. This insight suggests that delis

should consider offering sandwiches with robust, flavorful cheeses, a greater variety of condiments and artisan breads.

BelGioioso Cheese, headquartered in Green Bay, WI, offers pre-sliced Provolone, Fontina, Asiago and fresh Mozzarella. In addition, Emmi Roth USA, in Monroe, WI, has introduced sliced cheeses in trendy flavors. These include Van Gogh Natural Smoked Gouda, Dill Havarti, Horseradish Havarti, Jalapeño Havarti and Peppadew Havarti in 6-ounce packages with a recipe on the back panel.

3. Offer Lunch Ideas for Rotisserie Chicken

Forty percent of surveyed consumers say they purchase rotisserie chicken every time or almost every time they shop the deli, according to Mintel research published in the Madison, WI-based International Deli-Dairy-Bakery Association's (IDDBA), 'What's In Store 2013. The goal is to have shoppers buy two chickens – one for dinner and one as an ingredient for lunchbox sandwiches. Recipe suggestions should not be limited to simply bread, mayo and sliced chicken. "Children are now conditioned to expect foods that offer unique ingredients and flavors that make them fun, delicious and desirable," says Tyson's Fuqua.

Hearty spreads should be included to spice up a rotisserie chicken sandwich. Kelly's Kitchen, in Verona, WI, has introduced four new olive tapenades, including traditional with feta, Mediterranean with goat cheese, Spanish-style with GranQueso, and Italian with Parmesan. Each comes in a 6-ounce container.

Similarly, Martha's Fine Food, in Milwaukee, WI, offers Martha's Pimento Cheese, a ready-to-eat spread made with aged Wisconsin cheddar and packaged in 8-ounce containers. Pimento cheese spread has been a long time favorite in the Midwest, but it is now branching out as a favorite sandwich filling for adults and kids across the country.

4. Entice SNAP Customers

Delis can take a bite out of the \$68 billion dollars that funds SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), formerly called Food Stamps. "One in six or 45 million Americans uses SNAP, and these consumers are not geographically or demographically limited. Seventy-five percent have children at home," explains Tyson's Fuqua. "Most retailers don't know that cold-prepared foods, including deli sandwiches as well as fried chicken, wings and tenders, are SNAP eligible."

Depending on the individual store



demographics and/or company policies, labeling SNAP foods would help moms make better choices while avoiding any confusion as to what foods are eligible. Of course, this requires commitment and pristine execution to make sure there are not embarrassing moments at the check-out counter.

5. Put a Spin on Traditional Sandwiches

Kids like hand-held and bite-sized foods. Delis can satisfy both cravings, plus the demand for something different, by offering wrap sandwiches cut into pinwheels. These kid-size offerings are easy to make and fun for kids. They also can be pre-made and available for daily lunch pick-ups.

Francis Wall, vice president of marketing for BelGioioso Cheese, explains how. "One retailer simply unwraps our 12-ounce Unwrap & Roll Fresh Mozzarella Sheet, fills it with ingredients from their Mediterranean Bar, rolls it back up and slices the roll into 1-inch thick pinwheels. Then, slices [are merchandised] on plastic-wrapped trays as a snack solution."

Wall suggests a deli operator could also show this pinwheel concept in signage and then merchandise a variety of ingredients together in the cold case so each roll can be customized based on a child's taste preferences. Smoked turkey, salami, roasted tomatoes, grilled vegetables and olive tapenade are all kid-favorite fillings.

Demetrios Haralambatos, corporate executive chef for Kontos Foods, headquartered in Paterson, NJ, says, "Wraps and crepes can be used to make pinwheel sandwiches."

Kontos sells packs of 9- and 11-inch traditional and savory French-style crepes and 9-inch and 10-inch wraps in white, whole-wheat and multigrain as well as 10 flavors, such as southwestern, Caesar and



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garlic pesto. In addition, the company also makes a 9-inch gluten-free wrap.

Deli meats are ideal ingredients to roll up in crepes or wraps. "Our products have always been a staple for back-to-school lunches," says Justine Giordano, director of marketing and regional sales manager for the Vincent Giordano Corp., headquartered in Philadelphia, PA. "Staples include roast beef, corned beef and pastrami."

Deli operators can promote crepe or wrap pinwheels by highlighting a different sandwich variation for each day of the school week. This can be accomplished in a couple of ways. First, the bread, filling and condiments can be highlighted with a cents-off promotion for customers who buy all three. Secondly, these ingredients can be cross merchandised together with signage that suggests how moms can mix and match to make a week's worth of sandwiches for lunches. Third, signage over the sandwich case or table tents placed on top of the service counter can spotlight a kid-friendly sandwich special of the day.

6. Promote Picks & Bites New meal ideas to break up the routine are another of the top five challenges facing

moms, according to the NPD group's 2012 research.

The Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board (WMMB), in Madison, WI, offers a brochure called Picks & Bites. The brochure illustrates 36 ways to skewer ingredients on a toothpick. "Some are upscale appetizers and others are great for kids," says Marilyn Wilkinson, director of national product communications for the WMMB. "For example, there's a Baby Pick – a baby Swiss cheese cube, ham chunk and green grape topped with a pretzel knot, and a Wisconsin Pick – sausage, pepper jack cheese, sweet pickle and cheddar cheese curd."

Delis can merchandise ingredients for four or five pick ideas in one section of the refrigerated cold case, offer these brochures in front of the case and promote kid-friendly bento-style lunch boxes to pack either the assembled picks or pick ingredients.

7. Build It with Portion Packs & They Will Come The biggest challenge at the store level is finding space to create a destination for back-to-school snacks, explains Cedar's Mediterranean Foods' Frocione. "Most retailers

rely on letting consumers find single-serve packs scattered in amongst multiple use packages. Many of these items get lost on the shelf, and there are some healthy and nutritious items out there that many consumers have never tried because they don't want to buy a bigger size and repack refrigerated items for their kids to take to school. Creativity is required to build such a destination with the tight control placed on stores by plan-o-grams, but the effort can prove profitable."

Ideal products to build this destination display include Cedar's All Natural Snack Packs. The line of 3-ounce portion-packed products includes hummus with pretzels or hummus with certified gluten-free hummus chips in multiple flavors (Original, Roasted Red Pepper and Garlic Lovers) as well as salsa with tortilla chips and spinach dip with pretzel combinations.

Other items to merchandise are BelGioioso's 1-ounce fresh mozzarella snack packs, which contain three 1/3-ounce ciliegine-size balls sealed without water in an easy-open thermoform pack. BelGioioso also offers new snacking cubes, pre-cubed Parmesan, Asiago and Sharp Provolone, packaged in individual 4.5-ounce cups.



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8. Take a Cue from Produce

Cartoon characters have been used to sell kids on center store foods like candies, cookies, chips and cereals for years. Now, supermarket perishables departments are getting in on the game and using these influential pen and ink personalities to push healthier fare. Proof of this is the rise of Disney-branded fruits and vegetables in the produce department. The deli can get in on the game this fall. The Sabra Dipping Co. has licensed the use of the SpongeBob SquarePants' character and will print this familiar face on its classic 2-ounce hummus singles for a limited time this fall.

Sabra's McGuckin explains, "You don't want to commercialize the deli nor have customers think of the deli like the grocery aisle or dairy case, so, you have to be careful and creative. After all, the deli is where the experiential shopper comes to find high-quality products. This is the deli's core competency. We've put a toe into this arena by positioning our premium hummus for back-to-school with a character kids can relate to. It's our recognition of an opportunity. In the future, I hope to see delis with not just one or two items like ours displayed here or there, but working with trade to make a concerted effort and

overall push to go after the kid market."

9. Think Beyond Sandwiches

Sandwiches are traditional favorites for the school lunchbox, but they aren't the only menu selections in town.

Tyson's Fuqua says, "It's a fact that children prefer 'chin up' foods that allow them to keep their heads up and see their friends' faces while eating. Cold items, such as boneless wings, chicken tenders and boneless fried chicken, are on trend and top the list."

Delis can make or purchase and merchandise savory cupcakes for a novel lunchbox entrée. Variations include macaroni and cheese, meatloaf, and chili and cornbread mix baked into the size and shape of a cupcake.

Cedar's Mediterranean Foods' Frocione says, "We have seen a trend to send some of our healthy salads, like Taboule, Lentil, Chickpea, Black Bean or Edamame, to school. They are available in 8-ounce packages, which many people consider single-serve."

Delis can sell all the entree items in the refrigerated grab-and-go case, recommends Tyson's Fuqua. "Over 65 percent of deli purchases are made from the grab-and-go merchandising area. What a great place

to also stock healthy halo items like cheese and fruit, cut up chunks or whole apples. This provides the ingredients for a complete mom-inspired meal and is a sure way to increase impulse purchases and total deli sales."

10. Add Eye-Catching Signage & Theater

"Think of back-to-school as a training time," suggests Sabra's McGuckin. "Use this time to train parents and children that the deli has everything they need to provide a healthy, homey, wholesome kid-centric lunchbox solution."

One way to achieve this is with customized point-of-sale. For example, delis can try signage in the shape of a school bus stop sign hanging over the department or a particular destination in the deli. Displays can be built around signage with themes, such as 'Build a Fresher Lunchbox' or 'Have a Lunchbox Picnic'. This signage might also include a picture of a deli lunchbox meal, such as a turkey sandwich on whole wheat pita, carrot and raisin salad, a cheese stick or cube and an apple or pear."

Tyson's Fuqua adds, "Shoppers like theater of the deli, they like to be entertained and surprised."

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Grabbing for Profits

With changing consumer consumption habits and innovative products, the growing grab-and-go segment offers more profit potential than ever for deli departments

BY LISA WHITE

There are a number of success stories in the burgeoning supermarket deli grab-and-go segment, but one obvious opportunity was overlooked by many until now.

After 14 years of manufacturing fully-cooked Southern-style frozen side dishes that supermarket delis would rethermalize and serve in full-service cases, BD&K Foods in Auburn, AL recognized an untapped niche. While there are many side dishes appropriate to the rotisserie category, no one had a program that was directed to increasing rotisserie sales by offering high quality side dishes.

This led to the creation of the company's Fixin's, a new product launch that recently went into testing at the retail level. "Today, it's all about convenience," Oliphant says. "This line offers eight different side dishes that are heated up and displayed in warmers adjacent to rotisserie chicken. Now there is an entire meal available for grab-and-go."

Research by Springdale, AR-based Tyson Foods has revealed that only one in four consumers shop the deli prepared foods area, yet more than 65 percent of their purchases are cold grab-and-go items.

"We invested heavily in consumer research that included specifics around shopper habits, which was never done before to this extent in the prepared foods arena," says T Gill Fuqua, Tyson's brand manager for deli and prepared foods. "Everyone thinks of the deli as a cold service bar, but we've found that there's an increasing trend in cold grab-and-go sales."

Like BD&K, Tyson saw an opportunity to capitalize on this growing segment. The company launched its Tyson Deli Market over a year ago.

"Over the last three years, we've seen retailers increase grab-and-go shelf space and assortment to bring value to the shopper,"



Fuqua says. "It's a state of mind change in terms of prepared foods in the deli."

Defining Grab & Go

Looking at recent product introductions, it's evident that the landscape of grab-and-go supermarket deli offerings has definitely evolved.

The Tyson Deli Market line includes 14 heat-and-eat side dishes, entrees and meals, including pasta, chicken and pork items priced between \$3.99 to \$5.99. These refrigerated items have a 10-day shelf life.

"During testing, we found certain varieties consumers are attracted to, so we continue to expand our assortment, flavors and geographic territory," Fuqua says.

The grab-and-go products definition also encompasses items that may not be eaten on the run, but can be quickly heated and served.

For example, Nuovo Pasta Productions, Ltd., based in Stratford, CT, offers a grab-and-go deli line that can be prepared in under five minutes.

"Our product is not something consumers can grab and eat on their way out of the market, but it is indicative of participation or quick prep meals," says Tom Quinn, executive vice president and chief operating officer of the company. "[These types of products have] found much success, as people's lifestyles have changed."

The company's pasta lines were developed to provide consumers with a restaurant experience at home, which is the underlying trend of the latest grab-and-go lines. In addition to convenience and portability, quality and taste have come more to the forefront.

This has encompassed aspects of the food industry overall, such as ingredients that are more natural, nutritious and healthier.

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The attribute of freshness also is at the forefront of today's grab-and-go lines.

Stefano Foods in Charlotte, NC supplies dough-enrobed products that are best consumed right after heating.

"As a refrigerated packaged sale enables the customer to choose when the product is heated, it leads to the best eating experience," says Alan Hamer, Stefano's vice president of sales and marketing.

Innovative and updated packaging has helped propel grab-and-go sales in supermarket delis. With features such as reclosable containers and microwavable materials, these products provide added convenience for consumers.

Fabri-Kal Corp., a packaging supplier

headquartered in Kalamazoo, MI, has designed a couple of lines geared for deli grab-and-go sections. The Crystal Clear packaging was created to enhance food presentation, but also is constructed of a material that performs under either room temperature or refrigerated conditions.

In February, the company launched its Greenware On-the-Go Boxes line, which also can be utilized with refrigerated or room temperature items. Made entirely of plants, as opposed to oils, the packaging is available in two-, three- and four-cell designs with one flat lid that fits all three types.

"These product lines were designed for grab-and-go with the operator in mind," says Emily Ewing, marketing manager. "It

addresses the need to present food on the shelf attractively to encourage sales, while also providing convenience and easy opening for consumers."

With the various cell designs, supermarket delis can get creative with food combos, which encourage a variety of purchase points and merchandising options.

The company's grab-and-go packaging solutions also includes a cup that can be turned into a carryall for segregating foods like chips and salsa, fruit and yogurt and vegetables and dip. This includes a cup, insert and lid.

Building Brands

Manufacturers say brand-building is a

CASE STUDY: Sabra Dipping Company, White Plains, NY Endorsement

Seven years ago, the hummus category totaled just \$100 million in sales for all retail channels; today it's at \$700 million.

Sabra Dipping Co. in White Plains, NY can be credited for much of the growth that has turned hummus into the new salsa.

"We went from a six to 60 share in only six-and-a-half years, and our volume for warehouse shipments went from \$20 million to \$350 million in all classes of trade [during this time period]," says John McGuckin, Sabra's executive vice president. "Sabra has been responsible for 90 percent of the category growth."

More people are snacking today than ever before, as much as seven or eight times, as opposed to eating just three square meals, which has become passé. This is good news for the deli grab-and-go segment and companies like Sabra.

As category leaders, Sabra not only addressed the trend in grab-and-go food, but knew that it was incumbent to innovate all the time.

"People are eating on the run, bringing food to the office, eating less full course meals and more snacks throughout the day to satisfy diet needs," McGuckin says. "This provided another opportunity to provide wholesome food, and we knew that our hummus would fit that niche."

The company recognized the added opportunity in the supermarket deli department, where an increasing number of shoppers are seeking convenient, nutritious snacking solutions.

Following its success with pairing grab-and-go hummus and Rold Gold pretzels, Sabra launched another co-branded product that combines its salsa line with Tostitos tortilla chips.

"We noted the success of the pretzel and hummus product on college campuses that translates to delis," McGuckin says. "We're seeing major retailers include these items in their grab-and-go sets. Hummus is playing a significant role in providing a customized solution for consumers."

Future co-branding and new product opportunities are planned, including a possible tie-in with Sabra's new guacamole line.

"We have an 86,000-sq.-ft. plant in Richmond, VA where we are constantly working, innovating and building solutions with our product lines," McGuckin says.

One future focus may be on the children's segment, as much opportunity lies for lunch box snack packs and healthier snack options.

"Why can't refrigerated perishable foods play a role in healthful options for kids?" McGuckin says. "Lunch boxes with ice inserts and products with themes around schools can expand the consumption of these products to include children."

To capitalize on this demographic, Sabra is launching a 2-ounce hummus back-to-school line featuring popular cartoon character Sponge Bob Square Pants on the packaging.

"Creating innovative packaging that doesn't mimic the regular offering is key," McGuckin says. "Manufacturers have to be creative and provide a solution that's all-in-one. Our hummus and pretzels and Tostito chips and salsa are examples that include all the necessary components."

The usage of grab-and-go products also needs to be obvious. Consumers have to be easily educated in terms of the item's day part, including when and how it should be consumed. The packaging should be easy to open and the food should taste good, while offering nutrition.

"Retailers need to develop more theater around grab-and-go at the store level to better compete with c-stores," McGuckin says. "Although many retailers have these items in their set, they don't bring them to life for consumers."

Locating all of the components in one place is ideal. Having a cash register situated by the grab-and-go section so people can get out quickly, and tying in these items with beverages like coffee, soda or bottled water, makes it easier for consumers to pick these items up.

"Consumers have to break down barriers in terms of boundary lines between the different grocery departments, then delis can compete in a whole new way," McGuckin says. "

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must to make a deli department's grab-and-go section more of a destination for consumers.

Chicago, IL-based Dutch Farms, Inc. primarily offered its cheese lines in the dairy department, but saw a growing opportunity in the deli's grab-and-go section. Rather than create a new brand, it was decided that the Dutch Farms brand would be extended and upscaled.

"We knew that if we were going to take on this endeavor, it couldn't be the same product we successfully offered in the dairy, because we had to address a need that wasn't filled," says Karen Van Prooyen, Dutch Farms' marketing director. "We looked at dairy customers and the expectations of the deli department and found that people's tastes are becoming more developed and advanced."

With consumers eating out more and honed in on food entertainment trends, which includes the proliferation of celebrity chefs, cooking shows on The Food Channel and the availability of recipes on social media like Pinterest, the bar has been set much higher than in the past.

"Because everyone wants to make food at home that they've seen on TV, social media or in restaurants, consumers' tastes and expectations at grocery stores are changing," Van Prooyen says.

This resulted in Dutch Farms' creation of a premium cheese line geared for deli grab-and-go areas. The Deli Reserve line, which features reclosable packaging, is supported by in-store sampling programs and heavy advertising as part of the rollout.

"Years ago, manufacturers could sell these products based on price, but over the years we've come to be recognized, so it's important for us as a smaller company to tell our brand story," Van Prooyen says. "It's also imperative to put marketing support behind these brands."

Deli Reserve's marketing efforts include cable television, consumer magazines, radio and social media.

"Whether the retailer is an independent or a big chain, branding is critical, even if it's a store's private label product," Fuqua says. "Best-in-class retailers or those who take market share from other retailers brand their grab-and-go products."

Although the importance of branding cannot be overstated, quality is even more pertinent to the success of a deli's grab-and-go section.

"Quality is what brings people back, along with creativity," Quinn says. "The goal of any program can't be a single sale, it's about repeat sales that come from providing innovation and excitement."

Whether the grab-and-go section includes branded items from well-known manufacturers or private label offerings, it's a unique selection that will help encourage repeat visits and purchases.

"[This is why] we have spent a lot of our time and resources on constantly innovating and creating new and exciting flavor profiles," Quinn says. "We started selling our products to restaurants and hotels more than 24 years ago and that has helped us bridge the gap between our retail and food-service offerings. It's about providing consumers with the answer to what's new and what's for dinner. Many retailers are doing a great job of that."

With a growing selection of unique grab-and-go offerings, manufacturers are providing deli retailers with the means to expand their sections.

In an effort to expand its grab-and-go selection beyond Italian-inspired items, Stefano Foods recently launched BIGDOGS, 6-ounce hot dogs and sausage products that can be heated in less than two minutes in the microwave.

Pittsburgh, PA-based Conroy Foods' Beano's line is geared to create incremental impulse sales in deli grab-and-go sections, according to Weyd Harris, national sales manager.

Product Positioning

Limited floor and display space can make creating a decent grab-and-go section challenging. Yet, proper product positioning is key to the sales success of these products.

"Refrigerated and prepackaged prepared food is a new idea and requires space allocation and allotment," Fuqua says. "Typically, retailers have these areas available."

Deli departments also are more likely to prepare grab-and-go foods on site than in years past.

"Retailers understand that it makes for a better business plan to increase shelf space for refrigerated grab-and-go products," Fuqua says. "The deli area strategy is totally different than for the center store or frozen aisles."

These sections should be positioned in highly visible areas for those dual income households looking for quick dinner options.

"Putting a soft display by the refrigerated pasta that includes a basket of bread or stock of olive oil means consumers don't have to go far to make a meal," Quinn says.

When it comes to grab-and-go, convenience will drive the sale.

BD&K offers point of purchase merchandising for chicken warmer displays, while its packaging is see-through to enhance impulse sales.

"We are working with several chains that get it," Oliphant says. "The product should be the star of the show."

For Dutch Farms, the positioning is about offering the best cheese in the deli, as opposed to the dairy.

"Years ago, people wouldn't ask for Gouda in the deli," Van Prooyen says. "Today, grab-and-go is geared for specialty cheeses, due to all of the changes and behaviors of consumers."

With product innovation, new packaging and increasing merchandising opportunities, deli departments' grab-and-go sections are expected to become even bigger profit centers in the future.

"Dollar sales of deli prepared foods are expected to be up 3.9 percent next year," Fuqua says. "These products continue to outperform the rest of the store in many aspects."

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Soups Equal Opportunity

An increasing number of supermarket delis are discovering that there are growing opportunities for well-operated fall soup programs

BY LISA WHITE

Supermarkets that have tried and been unsuccessful with soup programs in the past should reconsider instituting a program in the deli department. This is because, in the last three decades, consumer preferences and eating patterns have changed almost as much as retail soup programs.

"Today's consumers want fresh ingredients, like herbs, spices and vegetables that can be tasted and uniquely identified in each spoonful of soup," says Lynnea Jodway, marketing coordinator at Sandridge Food Corp., based in Medina, OH. "It's all about the experience of enjoying a savory meal."

Today, with the growing number of options, these products are profitable additions to deli department prepared food programs.

"Fresh cup soup sales in the deli are up about 18 percent," says Robert Sewall, executive vice president of sales and marketing for Blount Fine Foods, based in Fall River, MA. "Soup is definitely something retailers can invest space in because they will see a decent return in sales. Soup is on 62 percent more menus in casual dining restaurants and 52 percent more menus for white table cloth restaurants. The category is growing in the foodservice and retail sectors."

Flavor Trends

Innovations in varieties and flavors have helped propel the soup category to new heights.

"We're seeing an increase in global flavors, which includes regional international styles," says Levon Kurkjian, vice president of marketing at Kettle Cuisine, located in Chelsea, MA. "This is something that has been happening for a couple of years now, but is gaining momentum each year and has broader acceptance."

The most successful retailers are integrating flavors and ingredients from different cultures into soups with a more familiar



format.

"In fresh soups, taste and flavor are critically important," Kurkjian says. "In the early days of this category, freshness was the number one factor, but now health and wellness are equally important as well as taste."

Even with the continued flavor innovation, the tried and true staples still sell best. These include chicken noodle, tomato and broccoli cheddar.

"For fall, the focus is more on rotating different varieties based on the season to create increased interest in the category," Kurkjian says. "Alternatives typically include butternut squash or pumpkin bisque, which help draw consumers to the category that may not typically purchase soup."

Just like soup preferences vary depending on the region, demographics also play a part in which flavors sell best.

What is now universal is that Americans are seeking foods with healthier ingredient profiles, reduced sodium and less calories.

"No matter what the age, people are looking to eat healthier, given the opportunity," Sewall says. "Still, there is a movement toward more robust soup flavors."

In the past, consumers would sacrifice taste for soup that was more nutritious, organic and all natural, but now this category offers satisfying flavors with healthier ingredient profiles.

"As deli buyers are considering menu options, they should rely on manufacturer partners to supply flavor information," says Jamie Collins, director of marketing for St. Louis, MO-based Kent Precision Foods. "Many times, manufacturers are members of other research organizations and can be a valuable resource for popular flavors."

Becoming a destination in this category depends on thinking outside the box, but in a way that won't lead to an increase in shrink or loss of dollars.

"We like building cup programs off of bulk or foodservice programs, because it's easier



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to sample unique soups this way,” says Bobby Ray, vice president of retail at Haliburton International Foods, based in Ontario, CA. Its retail division is Select Store brands. “It’s best to offer different soups each day, changing flavors often or offering a soup of the day to make the deli destination. This way, if a flavor fails, the retailer can quickly move on to another item and that flavor can be taken out of the rotation.”

Because soup popularity is regional, a popular soup variety down south may not work out east.

“Selection is important to drive soup sales,” Ray says.

Limited time offers are another option retailers can take advantage of to ramp up soup programs.

This fall, Sandridge is offering two limited time only items. Turkey-Kale soup has chunks of turkey, fresh-chopped kale, diced onions, northern beans and wild rice in an herb broth. Mushroom Orzo soup includes diced mushrooms, orzo, onions and parsley simmered in a creamy broth with notes of brandy.

“Many limited time offers will feature seasonal ingredients. This lends to the authenticity and freshness of the products,” Jodway says. “It is always good to introduce soups people can connect with as well as soups that remind them of the season.”

Building a Program

When building a fall soup program, retailers should strive to create a destination for soup.

“Most people believe that they have to dedicate a ton of space to it, [but that’s not the case],” Kurkjian says. “It is important to make it abundantly clear to shoppers that you understand soup and are committed to it. This can be accomplished with as few as four hot wells and four facings of refrigerated soup or as many as eight hot wells and 30 facings.”

It’s the soup programs that are well-managed that will make an impression. This includes pairings, combos and cross merchandising with bakery items.

“On the refrigeration side, it’s important to have a constant rotation to keep consumers engaged and loyal to the category,” Kurkjian says.

It’s important soups are served at the proper temperature for food safety as well as flavor, with the right consistency and seasoning.

The variety should include options for vegetarians, vegans and choices for those with other dietary restrictions.

“When building a soup category, retailers should include a breadth of everything—a



well thought-out mixture of broth-based soups, cream soups, bisques and chowders,” Jodway says.

Retailers can further set themselves apart by creating an easy-to-find section for fall soups and running promotions to draw attention to these products.

Those without a clean and dynamic hot to-go section are not showing the dedication this category deserves.

“It’s important to offer hot to-go and refrigerated packaged soup,” Sewall says. “If the soup tureens are not full, that’s a bad sign. If there are only two soups offered, it doesn’t show a commitment to the category.”

The good news is that soup does not require a big labor commitment. These items are put out at the start of the day and replenished as needed. The soup area only needs basic upkeep throughout the day like the salad bar and other self-service deli areas.

“If a deli department wants to compete with restaurants, they have to act like them,” Sewall says. “This includes staying fully stocked and providing an appealing selection and eye-catching display.”

The recommended number of soups varies, depending on the store’s location. Ideally, retailers should offer at least three to four hot soups to-go and eight to 12 in cups.

Sewall says the number one-selling size is a 24-ounce soup, while the 16-ounce is the second most popular. Those offering a soup and sandwich and/or salad program will want to include single-serving sizes in the lineup.

“When considering how many sizes to offer, retailers have to evaluate where they are in the soup world,” Sewall says. “One size does not fit all.”

Fresh soup programs, in particular, should

mimic the can varieties in the grocery aisle, but offer more.

“Varieties like chicken noodle can include a clean chicken broth base, white meat and vegetables, along with other ingredients that aren’t available from brands in the grocery aisle,” Sewall says. “Clam chowder and lobster bisque made with real cream and fresh seafood is decadent, yet can offer a price that is competitive with casual and fine dining restaurants, since delis are competing with these outlets.”

It’s important for retailers to gear soup programs to the store’s demographic. For example, younger consumers will be looking for more variety, so catering to them by providing different options will be critical.

Looking inside the store for ingredient ideas can help leverage costs, while helping to build profits.

“We offer a solid soup base and encourage delis to look at what’s popular in the produce section and in the perimeter of the store for ingredient ideas,” Collins says. “Incorporating a popular vegetable before it goes bad and repurposing this into a soup helps decrease overall waste and extends shelf life.”

Depending on the store and management structure, delis can partner with the produce and/or meat department to help create an effective and unique soup program.

“Stores definitely can see what their customers are attracted to and turn around and build a cup program dependent on this,” Ray says. “Soup manufacturers that utilize fresh ingredients and either refrigerate or freeze the product right away will have a fresher result than what store operators can make themselves.”

Carving Out Space

A successful soup program also is highly dependent on its location and how it is merchandised.

Most manufacturers recommend dedicating an end cap to these products, which provides added visibility and further shows the retailer’s commitment to this program.

“The programs that are really successful have dedicated kiosks, which are on the end of a salad bar or hot food bar,” Kurkjian says. “What doesn’t work well is when soup is dispensed behind the counter. Self-service programs are preferable than full-service, and stand-alone kiosks separate retailers from the pack.”

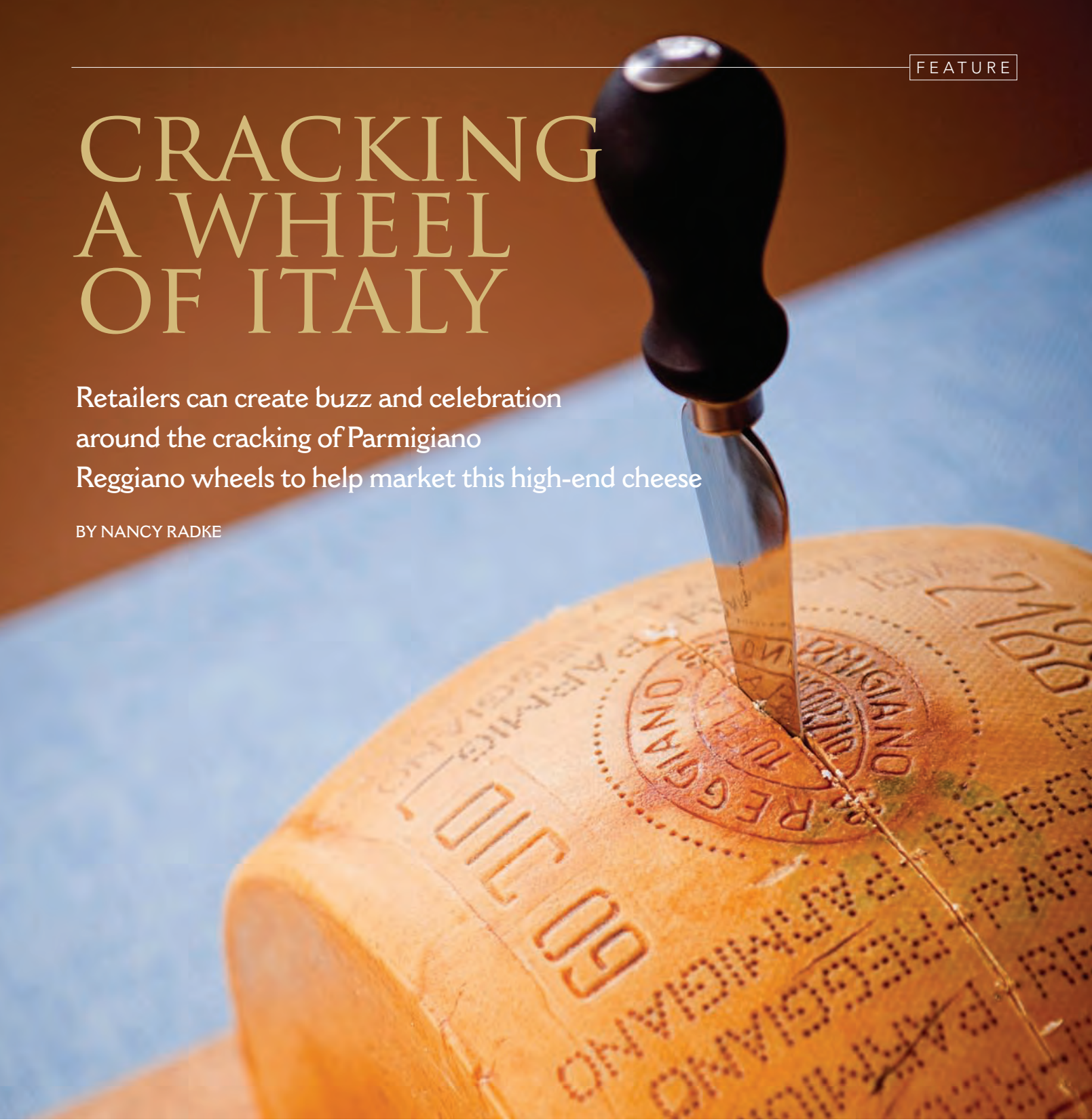
Creative cross merchandising and promotions are necessary to draw more shoppers to the prepared foods area.

With more people eating at home to save money, soup is an important option to offer as part of a sandwich and salad program. **DB**

CRACKING A WHEEL OF ITALY

Retailers can create buzz and celebration around the cracking of Parmigiano Reggiano wheels to help market this high-end cheese

BY NANCY RADKE



It is a ritual that has been performed millions of times over in the last eight centuries, but one that feels new and exciting each time a wheel of Parmigiano Reggiano cheese is cracked open. In the moment when the wheel splits, releasing its fragrance into the room and exposing its crystal-studded, granular texture to the air—magic happens. Finally, after two years of skillful forming and patient aging, the cheese is ready to be

celebrated by the cheese monger and those lucky enough to be close by.

The Right Tools

Cracking a wheel requires specialized tools developed over centuries. Part sharpened blade, part wedge, Parmigiano Reggiano cheese knives uniquely split the wheel to reveal its unique texture. The rind cutter with its hooked blade scores the rind to a depth of 3/8-inches. Into this scored groove

either the pointed spatula or the flat spatula plunges deeply into the paste of the cheese. During the process, the wedge-shaped almond knife widens the split and, finally, when two are used in an opposing motion, splits the wheel.

Two Ways to Crack the Wheel

The vertical score—across the two flat surfaces of the cheese and down each side—is preferred by cheese mongers



because it produces two vertical halves with a lot of protective rind. The opened face of the cheese can then be tightly enclosed in plastic wrap and stored or displayed. Vertical halves are compact and easy to maneuver in a tight prep space.

The horizontal score—around the circumference of the cheese—is preferred by caterers and cheese mongers going for the big presentation because it produces two beautiful rounds of cheese, which make a spectacular show. Hollowed out, this scoring allows Parmigiano Reggiano to be served directly from its own natural bowl. Once all the cheese is removed, the rind bowl can also be used as a spectacular container for sauced pasta or risotto.

Cheese Department Theater

Either way you crack it, opening a wheel of Parmigiano Reggiano creates an occasion to share with customers. The ritual and the physicality of it are fun for customers to watch, but their reward is even better, because there is nothing quite as delicious as the first few shards of Parmigiano Reggiano broken from the heart of a freshly-opened wheel.

Some stores like to get in a special wheel of Parmigiano Reggiano—extra-aged or made from the milk of a special breed of cow like the Red Reggian, White Modenese or the Brown La Bruna. But fun can be had opening regular Parmigiano Reggiano, as the cheese specialists at Whole Foods do every spring. By cracking 426 wheels simultaneously at 3 p.m. EST on March 9, 2013, the chain regained the Guinness Book of World Records for Most Wheels of Parmigiano Reggiano Cracked

Simultaneously that had been taken from them the year before by Loblaw's.

Some cheese mongers like to dress up or make special decorations and displays on cracking day. Others like to turn it into a competition by cracking wheels side by side to see who can crack it fastest.

Whatever method is used, retailers should use social media beforehand to alert and engage customers. Staff members should be employed to help portion the cheese into wedges after the event, because cracking is always a great way to increase sales.

Seven Ways to Promote

1. Watch a video to see how the pros do it.

The Consorzio del Formaggio Parmigiano-Reggiano has produced a video that describes step-by-step the technique of cracking the wheel vertically, dividing it into quarters and eighths and cutting even wedges for retail sale. As a bonus, there is information on the history and origin of the cheese, its nutritional values and recipe ideas that provide educational information to pass on throughout the cracking process. Retailers might also want to check out the videos on Youtube.com for additional ways to crack the wheel.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ph5S-PkGUBQ>

2. Purchase the necessary tools

The right tools always make the job easier, so retailers should plan on getting them in a few weeks before the big cracking. (See resources below.)

3. Order some POS

Customers love recipes and information, especially when they attend a cracking. Retailers can contact the Consorzio's U.S. Information Office and request a supply of recipe books, brochures and little picks to give away.

4. Create some buzz. Signs announcing the cracking event should be created and displayed several weeks before the big day.

5. Prep the wheel

At least 24 hours before the planned wheel cracking, the cheese should be out of refrigeration to warm to room temperature. It should then be rubbed down with a 50/50 water/white vinegar mixture to remove any surface mold.

6. Set the "stage"

Retailers should pick a cracking space where the wheel can be positioned on a sturdy table (preferably at counter height) so customers can gather around in a circle. If a cutting board is used, it should be set on a damp towel to prevent slipping. There should be plenty of room to flip the wheel. Retailers should line up the tools, set out the POS and get ready for the debut.

7. Get cracking

Retailers should make a few announcements of the cracking to alert shoppers of this special event. The ritual of cracking a wheel of Parmigiano Reggiano is spellbinding. And when that wheel finally pops and the beautiful fragrance is released, it will be well worth the extra effort.

DB

Resources: Parmigiano Reggiano cheese knives are available for purchase through knives@goodfoodcreative.com or by calling 315-475-0475. Ask for a brochure illustrating the vertical or horizontal crack, or both. You can also find knives for sale at <http://www.boska.com/en/>



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Tailgating With a Deli Touch

With the right product mix and merchandising tools, delis can become a destination for tailgaters

BY BOB JOHNSON



When the leaves start to turn scarlet, fireflies fizzle and fall falls with a thud as kids trudge into another school year, summer is really over.

As hard as it is to say goodbye to warm weather, there is one consolation. As

summer departs and autumn arrives, the barbeque grill stays just where it belongs, in perfect position for tailgating.

Whether in the backyard or a stadium parking lot, the humble outdoor cooker continues to do what it does best — bringing people together over great eats. Tailgate

season begins with the first football game kickoff and continues from September to February. Tucked in between are the more traditional holiday social gatherings.

“The stadium only holds 60,000 to 80,000 people, and that’s not a ton of people. People are buying tailgate packages, and they

may not even watch the game. It has more to do with the emotional connections of family and friends. It is less about the game and more about the connectivity,” says Terry Hyer, chief operating officer of Zarda Bar-B-Q Sauce, based in Blue Springs, MO.

Retailers need to keep in mind that tailgating is not mainly an event at stadium parking lots. And it’s not even about the game. This is an opportunity for friends and family to bond over food. The football game may just be incidental.

This is an event and a season custom-made for the deli.

“Big game entertaining with products from the deli is easy, but shoppers need to be reminded about the options that are available. The shopper [also] needs to be reminded that the deli is a good source for these products, and they need to be inspired to act. What will inspire them?” asks Eric Le Blanc, vice president of marketing for deli and convenience stores at Tyson Foods Inc., headquartered in Springdale, AR. “A food idea that sounds good and easy.”

Whip Out a Can of Interesting

Tailgating may be a guy thing, but these days it is also an opportunity to introduce flavors that pique interest and elevate the ordinary. Platters and cross-merchandised tailgate combinations can now include exciting foods that would, in another time, never cast a shadow in the stadium parking lot.

“When it comes to snacking or preparing something simple but amazing, I think consumers are looking for something that is truly new in the marketplace,” says Mike Hatch vice president of sales at Champignon North America, Inc., based in Englewood Cliffs, NJ. “Tailgating is becoming a way of having the ultimate picnic so it stands to reason that people want foods that are more exciting and bring a sense of wow to their event.”

While everyone loves a grilled cheese sandwich, it can turn into a melted mess on the grill. Champignon has solved the riddle with its Grill Meister cheese. A German soft-ripened Camembert, it can be heated in a pan or on a grill without the rind melting. One cheese is the perfect serving size for a cheese lover and the flavor is mild, creamy and slightly nutty. Just the right size for a hamburger toll, additional toppings such as chutney or pesto make for an easy gourmet alternative or just serve warm and runny for a hot appetizer or snack.

Relatively high-end cheeses and dips are finding a place onto tailgate burgers, with antipasti nestled nearby on the plate.

“Artichoke and asiago cheese dip gives



consumers the versatility they need, on top of burgers, flatbread pizza or mixed with crab for a dipping sensation,” says Carl Cappelli senior vice president of sales and business development at Don’s Food Products, located in Schwenksville, PA.

Along with a line of salads, soups and dips, Don’s also makes end-of-the-meal treats.

“Don’t forget dessert! Fill a cannoli shell for a unique crunch/sweet dessert on game day,” Cappelli says. “Let your fans dip into dessert mousse with cookies.”

At weekend living room parties, that culinary odd couple—parking lot chow and gourmet food—successfully partner together to create delectable, high-quality fare.

“Where once these types of party trays were made up of everyday cheeses, pepperoni and maybe some canned black olives, today’s consumer is looking to dazzle their guests—now more than ever,” says Giuliana Pozzuto, director of marketing at George E. DeLallo Co., based in Jeannette, PA. “With the rising popularity of gourmet, restaurant-quality foods at home, it’s no surprise that entertainment options would

also get a boost in that same direction.”

The centerpiece of the Mediterranean tailgate option is the olive and antipasti bar.

“The olives and antipasti bar is at the heart of convenient, gourmet entertaining. Consumers can select a variety of stuffed olives, marinated peppers and savory salads from the world over—tasty and ready-to-serve, but also with a striking presentation,” Pozzuto says. “If [delis are] looking to target yet another category of consumer, prepackaged olives and antipasti are the perfect game-day solution.”

Antipasti pairings speared together make for a colorful and inviting presentation.

“Great skewered pairings consist of a colorful combination of cured meats, cheeses, artichokes, marinated garlic, stuffed olives, peppers and fresh veggies from the produce department. Skewered antipasti are the perfect gourmet finger food for tailgating season,” Pozzuto says.

“I think people want to see a lot of variety, including Italian meats, specialty cheeses and antipasti,” Jeffrey Siegel, CEO of Farm Ridge Foods LLC, headquartered in Commack, NY, says. “You’re seeing a revival

of Italian salami, including sweet and hot. Include specialty olives and sweet horse-radish."

Siegel finds as many interesting possibilities on backcountry roads as in more distant trips to the Mediterranean.

"With pickles we used to like to make the standards, like garlic and dill. We have increased it to include hickory, sweet horse-radish and Wasabi. We were selling the

standard line for 100 years until I stopped at some farm stands with my daughter and saw people were pickling everything, fruits and vegetables," Siegel says. "We took that back to our R&D department and they came up with new products that have been massively successful."

Siegel believes the trend toward the innovative and interesting in all major areas of deli food are likely to make an appearance at tailgating parties.

RETAILERS NEED TO KEEP IN MIND THAT TAILGATING IS NOT MAINLY AN EVENT AT STADIUM PARKING LOTS. AND IT'S NOT EVEN ABOUT THE GAME. THIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY TO BOND OVER FOOD. THE FOOTBALL GAME MAY JUST BE INCIDENTAL.

"We've seen the same thing on the cheese end, and we've seen the same thing on the meat end," Siegel says.

And this could be the first platter season since 2007 when consumers feel they have a little more splurging cash than they did last year.

"People are spending money again. You're seeing more lavish tailgating; people are expressing themselves," says Pat Ford, co-owner of Ford's Foods Inc., located in Raleigh, NC.

Not only are people willing to spend a little more, they are also looking for ingredients that will let them strut their culinary stuff.

"People are bringing food to cook instead of buying food on the way. People have learned to cook again because they've had to," Ford says. "I'm seeing more low country boil. You boil sausage, corn, potatoes, shrimp and onions together in a pot, dump it on some newspaper and eat it with a sauce. It's messy, fun and easy to do."

Barbecue is mainstream at tailgate parties, and it keeps getting even bigger.

"If you look at what is on the menu at Appleby's, Subway and even the quick-service restaurants, barbecue is only increasing in momentum. Ribs are number one, but the new star is pulled pork," Hyer says.

Hyer believes that barbecue, a star at tailgate festivities in parking lots or in living rooms—with or without attention to the game—always delivers because of its long-standing association with social gatherings.

"Barbecue hits an emotional cord. It's a comfort food that is about family, friends and celebrations," he said.

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ball star Billy Butler. The proceeds from the sauce go to a local food pantry.

Easy-Schmeezy

Consumers are looking for more interesting and exciting tailgate options, but they also want those options to be easy.

"We're looking for something you can heat and serve with minimal prep that looks like you spent hours doing it. Ribs and pulled pork continue to be big for us. The biggest items for us are pulled pork, ribs and briskets," says Phillip Burger, vice president at Burger's Smokehouse, headquartered in California, MO.

If it's a buffet, 4- or 5-ounce burger portions make sense, or if it's a serving, 7- or 8-ounce portions will do.

To bridge interesting and easy, delis can use unique ingredients to take uncomplicated dishes to the next level.

"I think a lot of the best ideas are the simplest. If you have a beautiful piece of cheese, show it off. Sometimes a little signage compared to a lot is better. Simple beer and cheese pairings seem to be all the rage now and being a Bavarian cheese manufacturer, we are clearly going to be on board with this. Look for some very interesting pairings in the future," Hatch says.



A simple but versatile high-end ingredient can open up new worlds for the tailgate menu.

"Our new grilling cheese has a number of applications that enable it to tie in with the whole theme of quick and easily-prepared food items," Hatch says. "You can take this cheese as a whole and prepare it to order for each person using a variety of accoutrements. Anything from wrapping it with

bacon and smearing on fig spread to brushing it with honey and adding grilled apricots, the sky is the limit."

Condiments and sauces are the easiest way to make tailgate items unique, and to also allow each person at the party to customize their food.

"Grocery delis offer a variety of platters ranging from deli meats and cheeses to wings. A key to making the party event unique is by offering a variety of condiments. This way, each person can individualize their creation," says Weyd Harris, national sales manager at Conroy Foods, located in Pittsburgh, PA. "Including a choice of any Beano's Deli Condiments with purchase of a platter increases the deli ring and provides added value to the consumer. New this year is Beano's Sandwich Shakers. It's a dry seasoning of garlic and parmesan cheese that brings out the flavor of a variety of foods, including baked potatoes, salads, vegetables, or as a rub for pork or chicken."

Conroy's offers shippers specifically tailored to merchandising for tailgate parties.

"Creating a destination display of tailgating items creates incremental impulse sales. We offer a four-case shipper with a football-themed header that draws the customer's attention to our products," Harris



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says. "The retailer has the opportunity to select the products that it contains, making it customizable to their specific consumer needs."

Other producers agree that the right condiments or sauces can be an easy way to jazz up tailgate foods, while also adding an element of choice for the tailgaters.

"What's new is people wanting to take these simple finger foods to the next level of food-relevance — buffalo wings, blue cheese, and celery is fine, but what about rotisserie chicken lettuce wraps? Going from "good to wow is often as simple as the addition of a condiment, like a sauce, and adding a carrier," LeBlanc says.

Tyson has some content on DeliAnytime.com that features consumer-generated recipes for tailgating, and its Deli Blogger also includes ideas.

"With just a little more effort, a platter of boneless wings with some small rolls and a few condiments become big game sliders," LeBlanc says. "Chicken tenders, lettuce, tortillas and a few fixins and you've got a great make-your-own wrap station that every guest builds to his taste."

Healthy Food Gets the Green Light

There is an ancient association between



tailgating and an animal fat-kegger blowout. But even in this last bastion of cholesterol and excess, there is room for healthful options.

"Side salads for the healthier fans include grains, quinoa, wheat berry and seven grain, to name a few," says Cappelli from Don's Food Products.

Don's is expanding its All Natural line to

include bruschetta and pico de gallo.

"Display the grain salads in the deli case alongside bruschetta and Pico De Gallo. Consumers often purchase deli items with their eyes. The grain salads provide eye-popping color and variety," Cappelli suggests. "Sell healthy colorful grains in the deli case before the big game."

Because these items are versatile, a few ideas on their potential uses can go a long ways in merchandising.

"Many of the side salads can be eaten plain or used as a component. Retailers can achieve this by showing plating ideas like in foodservice. Give consumer ideas and they use salads as a component or ingredient," Cappelli says.

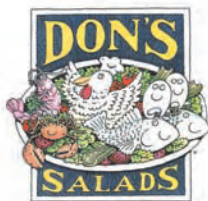
Added to those options are also healthier versions of more familiar tailgate foods.

"Chips and dip were always a go-to for party hosts. It's an easy appetizer. But now consumers are subbing for these classics with more gourmet, Mediterranean-inspired antipasti. For instance, a Greek platter of pita chips, feta, kalamata olives and hummus is a more desirable option," Pozzuto says.

Prime time to start the tailgating season merchandising campaign is months before the first football is kicked off.

"If you want the sale for game day, you need to build awareness early. Why not create a co-merchandised display that rotates out every week? A plated example of a recipe with all of the ingredients merchandised together is a great idea," LeBlanc suggests. "Make it bigger with sampling of the recipe. Make it bigger still with a bundled price. Make it huge with social media, using Facebook and Twitter to reach out to friends and followers, even offer an online coupon."

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Form and Function Drive Deli Packaging

New technologies offer appealing and functional benefits for deli-oriented items

BY BARBARA ROBISON



Unlike many facets of the food industry, new packaging options are usually problem solvers. Challenges such as protecting flavors and eliminating unwanted odors, keeping the “fresh” appeal of packaged goods, and more functionality are all issues that are being addressed with new technology.

Packaging is one of the few technology-driven aspects of the deli, and innovation often comes at great expense. Consequently, there are rarely “trends” as the word is used to describe popular flavors and cooking styles. Instead, due to the scientific nature and expense of developing more functional materials, innovation is often the result of a single company’s efforts rather than a general industry trend.

New packaging technologies geared to increase shelf life, convenience, merchandising appeal and sustainability have been developed. Whether it’s the desire for smaller portion control, greater freshness, food safety or concern over waste and the environment, packaging companies are developing innovative solutions providing a multitude of options.

It is also important for a deli buyer to distinguish between in-store

options and options for food manufacturers. While new alternatives are often available, buyers should be aware of developments so they can guide their suppliers into making choices that will benefit the retailer and their consumers.

“The challenge for deli operators is to maintain freshly-prepared in-store appeal with packages that support that look and feel, even if the product is pre-packaged off-site or by a processor,” states Marilyn Stapleton, director of corporate advertising/public relations for Anchor Packaging, a Ballwin, MO-based supplier of non-durable food packaging. “Easy-to-open and recloseable products will become even more important. This requires more R&D to develop [material] blends, which allows us to reduce costs to pass on to operators, just as our resin costs are rising. We must preserve performance for hot ready-to-eat foods and cold ready to re-heat in microwave packages, while driving out costs.”

To accommodate the requirements of these items, Anchor has added a new value product to its Culinary Series line. This includes a crisp food container using a cross-flow ventilation design to relieve moisture and condensation while maintaining product temperature. It

holds four large pieces of chicken or other fried food and is designed so fried foods can remain crispy rather than becoming soggy due to unwanted condensation in the refrigerated case.

"We've made design modifications and a new PET (polyethylene terephthalate) material blend in our one-piece Gourmet Classics line. It helps minimize cost due to resin price escalation, while improving performance. This includes anti-fog lids for cold applications and tear-away lids for table-ready

presentations," adds Stapleton.

Unique packaging plays a major role in assisting delis in providing new appealing products with bold flavors as well as healthier meal alternatives. More colorful packaging helps differentiate the newer items.

"[Because] multi-serve items require packaging that is easy to open and close, the need for peel and reseal packaging is growing," says Roman Forowycz, chief marketing officer at Clear Lam Packaging,

Inc., based in Elk Grove, IL, a developer and manufacturer of flexible and rigid food packaging.

To eliminate rigid and shrink band lids, Clear Lam has developed peel and reseal lidding films. This technology provides an easy way of opening and reclosing packaging, including tub-style packaging. It eliminates the need for a separate lid and offers greater packaging options for products that are packaged for more than a single use. Ideal for pasta and cheese snacks, it is also geared for sliced deli meats and cheeses, eliminating the need for more expensive zipper-packs.

Back of House Technology

When it comes to opening bulk deli meats and cheeses, current packaging has always presented challenges. Open a new turkey breast and water and purge often come gushing out, requiring the deli clerk to take the product to a sink or open it over a garbage can.

Duncan, SC-based Cryovac Food Packaging Systems' Sealed Air microlayering technology provides an easy-open feature for the company's Grip & Tear shrink bags, which is now a packaging option for deli meat manufacturers. Eliminating the problem with uncontrolled purge flowing out of the package and the need to use a knife to open the bag, the new bags shrink tightly around the product, are durable and include an easy pull-tab operation for better product control. The pull tab also creates an easy way to open the bags without the potential for cross contamination from an unclean cutting utensil that may have been used to open boxes or other packaging.

"Direct consumer applications have developed more slowly, but are being used with frankfurters and specialty cheeses like mozzarella," reports Mike Rosinski, Cryovac's marketing director, smoked and processed meats. "Kroger is now using the new bags for their private label meats and cheeses.

"Oven Ease bags or rollstock, another Sealed Air innovation, are used for pre-packaged prepared foods that are intended to be heated and sold either in the hot case or direct to consumer. Instead of opening the package and putting the food in a heat-safe container, the package can be poked with one hole, put directly on a baking sheet and heated up to 400° F.

"[This type of packaging is] good for items such as meat balls and hot wings. The product cooks 30 percent faster, is moister and retains heat for some time," says Rosinski.

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Prepared Food Packaging

Even fresh foods are being pre-packaged, but the challenge is making the consumer aware that just because the product is pre-packed by the manufacturer, it can still be very fresh.

One of the faster-growing trends within the category is the move toward self-service products.

"Consumers want to see the products merchandised appealingly and freshness is primary. The focus shouldn't be on what has been used in the past, but the product being highlighted and the correct package to make it more appealing to the customer," reports Chrissy Rapanos, senior marketing research analyst at Dart Container Corp. The Mason, MI-based firm is a provider of foodservice packaging.

Dart Container's line of PresentaBowls Pro includes clear and square black bowls for upscale food presentations.

"The clear bowls, made of PET or OPS (oriented polystyrene), have superior visibility, are flexible yet durable and perform well in cold temperatures, accommodating freezing down to -40° F," Rapanos says. "The black bowl base also is microwavable and performs well for both hot and cold applications."

Because food tampering is a major concern of both the deli operator and the consumer, Dart has used its technology to provide tamper-resistant packaging. The TamperAlert Hinge protrudes outward when torn, alerting the customer that the container has been opened.

Shelf life is typically front-and-center for buyers. As a result, there have been new designs and technologies centered on enhancing freshness for longer periods.

Cryovac's Freshness Plus is a new vertical pouch packaging system designed to extend freshness by incorporating oxygen scavenging solutions, which removes oxygen that migrates from the inside or outside of the packaging. It prevents degradation of the product by selectively absorbing odors in vacuum-sealed containers. With this technology, spoilage odors and other oxygen-related odors can be distinguished and removed. By removing off flavors and odors, good product flavor and color retention are maximized, which helps in optimizing shelf life.

Also a shelf-life enhancer, Cryovac's Sealed Air Simple Steps packaging uses pre-made trays with vacuum skin packaging, referred to as VSP, to preserve color, flavor and integrity. Raw products can be cooked in

the package or pre-cooked products can be packaged and post-pasteurized, then shipped, displayed and sold in the same package.

Reducing Waste

New options also are available when it comes to sampling and the old problem of including utensils in ready-to-eat prepared foods. While plastic may seem to be the best material, it is often very bulky and difficult to incorporate into a food package without adding significant cost.

One company has come up with an alternative that is gaining a fast reception. EcoTensil, Inc., Corte Madera, CA, has introduced an EcoTaster Mini tasting utensil for use with single-serve products and sampling programs. It's a smooth paperboard, which can be folded into a sturdy replacement for spoons. Especially valuable for sampling, the mini utensils take up very little room, are easy to dispose of and cost significantly less than plastic. EcoTensil has attractive displays available for counter displays.

"The tasters are sanitarily wrapped and can slip in between layers in two compartment packages. Many find the taster is preferable to a plastic spoon," comments Peggy Cross, EcoTensil's founder and CEO.

New materials are being developed to use in traditional deli packaging. When talking about sustainable, the trend is shifting away from biodegradable, because the cost is usually more expensive than retailers are willing to absorb or pass on to customers.

Instead, one manufacturer is developing a unique material that is made of recycled plastic. Environmentally friendly, Pak-Sher, located in Kilgore, TX, recently launched Envirosheets, interfolded deli/bakery sheets that are comprised of recycled milk jugs. The company also is continuing to improve its technological capabilities to allow it to maximize post-consumer resin or PCS content in more styles and sizes of deli bags.

"Many truly green products come with a hefty price tag. We are seeing some trending away from compostable product options due to the cost and a shortage of composting facilities. Recycling and recycled content is where the market is trending," says Michele Talucci, Pak-Sher's director of marketing. "Envirosheets are unique because this is a truly sustainable product, which is considerably less expensive than the wax sheets many delis use."

Looking ahead, packaging innovations geared towards increasing shelf life, convenience, eye-appeal and sustainability will provide additional options for deli operators in the years ahead.

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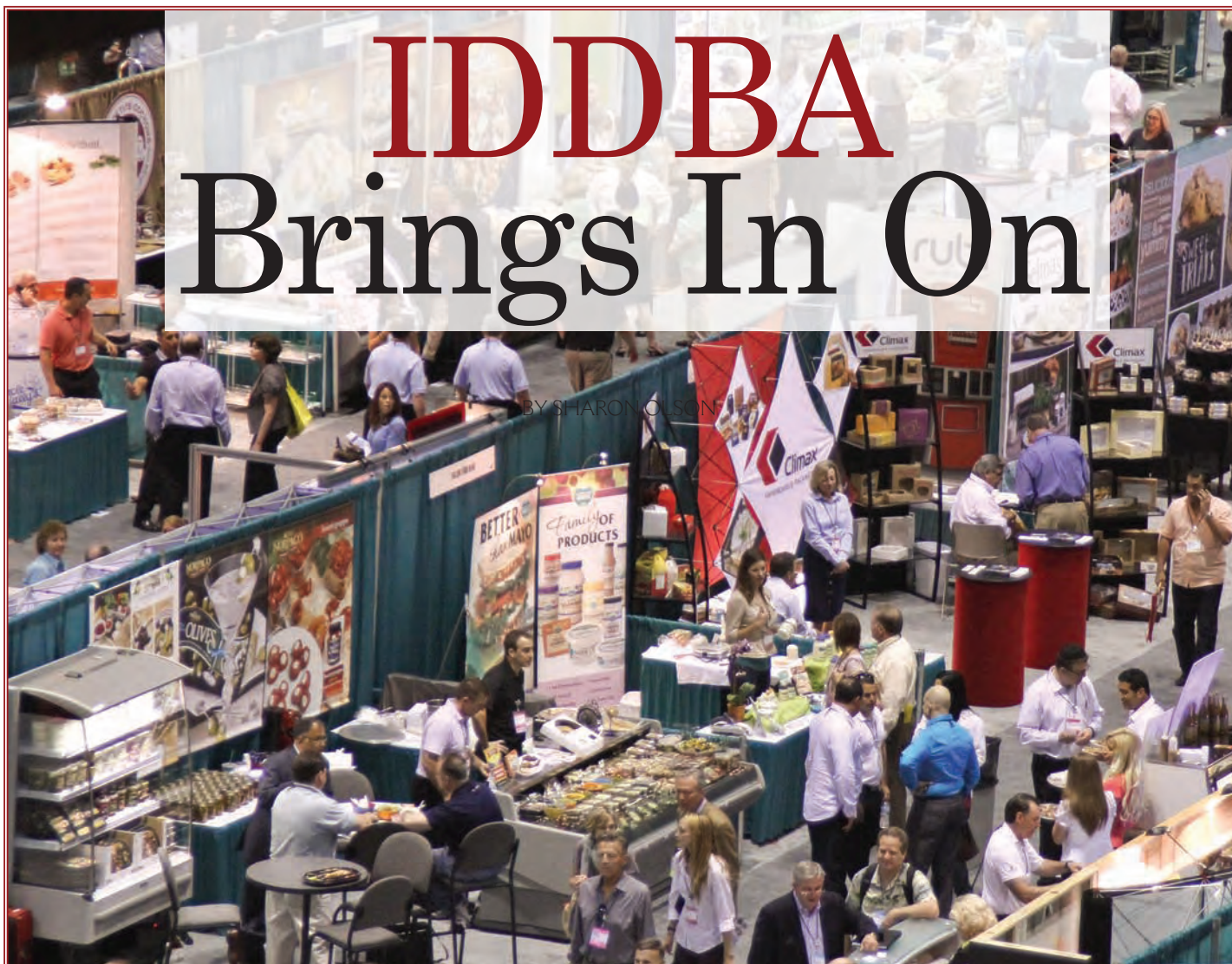


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IDDBA Brings In On

BY SHARON OLSON



This annual conference brings together leaders in the dairy deli and bakery business. 2013 was a record setting year with attendance of 9,000 professionals and more than 1,700 exhibitors. Products, programs and conversations focused on the challenges and opportunities of consistently delivering healthy, interesting, fresh and delicious food to consumers.

Deliciousness as a Lifestyle Choice

Food has to be delicious to appeal to consumers—from the value conscious to the gourmet. In an opening presentation, the CNN List of the Top 50 most delicious foods woke up the audience because it included some of the most notorious processed foods of minimal nutritional value. IDDBA chairperson Voni Woods, senior director of deli at Giant Eagle inspired attendees with her personal commitment to helping consumers of all income levels understand that there are no evil ingredients. Balance and mindfulness of portion sizes can

inspire all consumers to make deliciousness their lifestyle choice.

The Transformed Consumer

Economic conditions have created a new scrutiny of value by consumers across every socio-economic level. Technology has made everything “smart,” empowering consumers with information to fuel their decision making. Consumers are smart and connected, valuing the opinions of their peers more than manufacturer messaging.

Trust is a significant factor in brand choices. Millennial consumers in particular are evaluating companies not only on their products and their brands, but on their corporate conscience.

Evolving Store Formats

Consumer confidence in on-line shopping for food is growing and retailers are watching, exploring and creating more on-line shopping experiences. A key initiative for many retailers is ramping up their web presence to include key words that consumers

will use to search for food rather than using words that are used by industry insiders to describe how food is sold.

Understanding Artisan

Descriptive words without a standard of identity proliferate to the point that they become meaningless. When it comes to cheese, “artisan” really does mean something and there is the growing understanding that artisan cheeses are those made mostly by hand, in small batches and in keeping with cheese-making traditions.

Those classified as “farmstead” are made on a farm with milk from its own animals.

Healthier Sides and Salads

The trend towards more healthful preparations of sides and salads shows no sign of slowing down. In a recent Culinary Visions Panel Survey of deli consumers, salad concept recipes that were fresh and healthful scored as high as traditional and more indulgent recipes with consumers. Consumers are also expressing interest in grain-based sal-

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ads and those with ethnic flavors.

Side dishes are important because they help complete meals for busy consumers. A new line of southern style side dishes called "Fixin's" is meant to turn rotisserie chicken easily into a complete and satisfying meal.

Food and Flavor Trends

Bacon and Nutella—The of-the-moment flavors that will make almost anything more appealing to consumers.

Global Sandwiches—Globally inspired

ingredients, breads, wraps and condiments are adding new appeal to this already popular category.

Baby Bites—Making a big impression are tiny bites that are easy and elegant tastes from sweet to savory highlighted in the picks and bites ideas from Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board.

Re-inventing the Crunch—Wafer thin crackers and chips made with lentils, pasta and grits were sampled in a variety of flavors or for dipping. Lentil chips boasted gluten

free goodness in a shelf stable package with hummus for healthful snacking on the go. Brownie brittle and dark chocolate pretzel thins seen at several shows are coming on as the new dessert chip.

Savory Cones—Ice creams cones took a savory turn filled with falafel, mini meatballs and other savory fillings.

Clean Cuisine—Fresh and simple ingredients appeal to consumers looking for real food, pure and simple.

Layered and Luscious—Dessert indulgence features smaller portions delicately layered with taste, texture and eye-appeal.

Happy Tasting—New eco-tasters promise to make it easier for consumers to get a full size taste of deli products. A durable flat scoop is folded into a tasting scoop that is easy for the taster, hassle free for deli employees and promises to be cost-effective and compostable.

Taste Talk Tweet

Tweeters promoted a new pretzel bread bite product concept that was marketed as the new tortilla chip and used as a base for nachos; Mediterranean snacks being marketed as tapas-to-go; and a new-to-market Peruvian pepper that could replace Pepadew. Chicken burgers and meatballs were touted as better for you protein solutions for delis. Mobile-inclined attendees also noted new microwavable packaging that allows retail meal solutions to be sold as fully plated entrées.

Implications for Food Marketers

Expanded Flavor Portfolios—Categories like chips and hummus were seen with huge arrays of alternative flavors including original recipes, those with a fresh hit of lemon or boldly flavored heat and sweet.

Consumer Trust—Today's consumer is active and in charge when it comes to the foods they like and the places they like to eat thanks to social media interaction with their friends and trusted sources. Savvy marketers have learned how to stimulate or join the conversation, not just react to fallout.

Understand the why of the consumers' relationship with food. Demographics are only the beginning of understanding how to please today's consumer; understanding their perspectives and why they make the choices they do is key to success.

Mindfulness and Balance—Consumers evaluate healthfulness of many criteria including ingredients, emotion and social concern. Traditional free-from claims are moving to more contemporary claims that sell fresh and homemade with clean ingredient statements. Ethical food is becoming a cue for healthy.

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An International Perspective



By
Jeffrey Spear
President

Studio Spear
Jacksonville, FL

Having worked and researched food trends and retailing methodologies on every continent but Antarctica, it's nice to see a larger number of international brands finding their way into U.S. markets. That being said, and especially in the deli department, a significant number of buyers and managers do not share my enthusiasm for variety and diversity. Instead, they limit choice, resist change and will only maintain relationships with a small number of monolithic national brands. Additionally, the folks at the supermarket have yet to figure out how to engage

with their customers in a manner that creates loyalty and/or distinguishes their operation apart from, and undeniably ahead of the rest.

While languages may vary, and the products on the shelves can be quite different, the supermarket and deli dynamic from country to country is comparable to what we have at home. The stores are configured similarly, the display cases are familiar and shelves are stocked with mostly domestic brands (along with a few international offerings). The bottom line is that we can walk into a grocery store in Sydney, Dakar or Buenos Aires and have a nearly identical shopping experience as in San Francisco, Dallas or Baltimore.

Even in Europe, where the diversity and quality of foods, especially baked goods, cheeses and cured meats are world renowned, the shopping experiences remain overwhelmingly familiar.

Of course, some retailers have access to larger floor plans, invest more heavily in interior design, are creative with merchandising displays and able to deliver delightful, inviting, charming and engaging experiences. This is especially true for gourmet, boutique and specialty themed stores where prices tend to exceed national averages.

What's interesting is that innovation in food retailing and new methodologies for operation at the deli counter appear to be very slow in coming. Every now and then, one retailer out of thousands will find a way to connect with their customers in ways previously unimagined.

In many cases, innovation is an act of bravery and a willingness to challenge norms. In the U.S., retailers including Whole Foods, Central Market, Wegmans and AJs are just a few examples. In other cases, the act of embracing change is mandated by competitive pressures.

While working in Georgiyevsk, a small town in Stavropol Krai (Russia) near the Caucasus Mountains, I found that supermarkets were modest, relatively unsophisticated operations (some chains, some

independently owned) with limited options for product display or expansive inventory. Deli counters were a fraction of the size found in most U.S. supermarkets with a limited range of cured meats and cheeses and a meager selection of prepared hot and cold foods. Understandably, this responds to a culture that favors daily shopping in stores within walking distance and an economy that limits the degree of variety and/or luxury that can be afforded.

This being said, innovations developed in larger supermarkets and shopping centers in Moscow and St. Petersburg, such as in-store bakeries, a larger and more internationally diverse cheese case and larger deli counters (including a greater variety of prepared foods) were challenging retailing practices in these smaller towns. It was clear that neighborhood markets, to remain competitive, would need to respond.

In places such as Guyana (South America), Burkina Faso (West Africa) and Niger (West Africa), some of the poorest countries on the planet, imported foods are better prepared and presented and are preferred over locally produced equivalents. In addition, global brands such as Kraft and Nestle have found it easy to establish brand dominance. They have the

economic power to implement broad reaching advertising campaigns and influence buying decisions. Of course, innovation at the local level would be welcomed. Unfortunately, there is no economic capacity.

While supermarkets around the world may gain preference based on visual appeal, product variety, efficiency of operation or lowest price, there is another untapped and regularly overlooked opportunity.

The service counter in the supermarket, regardless of country, remains one of the few places for meaningful human interaction. Conversation does not have to be restricted to "Can I take your order?" or "Will that be all for today?" There is time to make introductions, build relationships and add value to the shopping experience. The good news is that, while some degree of professional training and operating guidelines are advised, this is a very low-cost, easy to implement activity. In addition, and what can start with service staff at the deli counter can be reinforced by other associates in the aisles and at check out before buyers leave the store.

While there may be a lack of innovation in supermarkets all over the world, and new hardware and build-outs can be quite expensive, the service counter in the deli department offers very real and unique opportunities to minimize competitive challenges, build loyalty and enhance brand preference with a personal touch.

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In many cases, innovation is an act
of bravery and a willingness to
challenge norms.

Blast From The Past

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Rumiano Cheese Company

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By the mid-1930s, the enterprise had developed into the largest cheese company in California with eight factories. As more efficient methods of milk hauling and cheesemaking prevailed, large plants became mandatory and the Rumianos sold all but two plants.

Today, Rumiano's cheese production takes place in Crescent City, which is located roughly 10 miles from the Oregon border in northern California. The area's mild climate and abundant rainfall allows for year-long grazing and award-winning cheeses. All cheeses are made from rBST-free milk.

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