



MERCHANDISING REVIEW

## Grab And Go — Fresher Is Better

### It pays to create a spot for healthy but quick food

BY BOB JOHNSON

Today's consumers want to eat more nutritious food, but they appear to have less time for complicated meal preparations.

This dilemma, however, can translate into a tremendous opportunity for delis that merchandise fresh and healthful offerings with grab-and-go convenience.

Taking advantage of this potential market begins with establishing a distinct grab-and-go section that makes a statement to your customers. "More and more stores are putting grab and go in sections rather than scattering the products around," says Mark Miller, vice president for marketing at Simply Fresh Foods in Buena Park, CA.

Some stores find it worth the time to develop an eye-catching ambience for this special section. "We have been seeing investment

in signage and a coordinated look for the deli," says Todd Muller, brand manager at Nestlé in Cleveland. "Make it look like a restaurant. We've seen a lot of retailers use signage and dedicated space for grab and go. Some retailers are even putting deli items on fliers, which they didn't do before."

The look and feel of the section, some producers believe, can decide whether or not it will be a success. "Grab-and-go sections should be bright, engaging and informative," says Jessica Brown, director of marketing for Yucatan Foods in Los Angeles. "As grab and gos are emerging in stores, they are appearing to be an afterthought not a highlighted location. Invite shoppers to browse grab-and-go sections through shelf messaging. Educate shoppers on

what the section has to offer, such as convenient lunches and health snacks."

During the busiest hours it may pay off to create an even more visible place where consumers can find all of the takeout options, and even enjoy the convenience of dedicated cashiers.

"The first thing is to have it located in a separate kiosk during peak hours, and have a separate check out for it," says Sharon Olson, principal at Olson Communications in Chicago. "To have repeat business, give customers a great experience. Make it delicious and have a service staff that acts like they care."

## Deli Means Fresh

An essential part of the experience that brings customers back to the grab-and-go section in the deli is the special **quality of food**. “Customers are looking for fresh,” says Olson. “The deli has the trump card because it is perceived as **fresh**. There’s more of a connection to the people who are making it.”

Suppliers, too, are competing to offer products that look and are more healthful and fresher.

“We’re getting away from chicken fingers that have been under the heat lamp for four hours,” says Muller. “There will still be comfort foods, but with a new contemporary twist. Ancient grains are making an impact, like quinoa. It gives it a healthy, fresher halo.”

Salad products, vegetables and plant based proteins are finding their way into grab-and-go products. “Grab and go is trending healthier,” says Miller. “I see hummus, salsa and yogurt offerings. I also see veggie trays where it used to be Slim Jims and beef jerky.”

Producers sense the trend and are expanding their lines of healthful salads. “Consumers are seeking healthier fare when it comes to takeout in the deli,” says Nathan Roe, category manager for Reser’s Fine Foods in Beaverton, OR. “We’re listening, and in six months we’ll launch a reformulated line-up of our American Classics deli salads removing artificial colors and flavors. Consumers are seeking these healthier grab-and-go salads.”

Reser’s also is developing a line of deli salad kits featuring produce grown at least relatively locally. “We’re teaming up with regional produce suppliers to create superfresh kits that can be mixed together and prepared on-site and re-packed for grab and go,” says Roe. “A few salad kits include the Watermelon Radish salad, Kale & Beet salad, Mango Tomato salad, and Brussels Sprout Apple Slaw.”

Dishes high in fiber, including vegetarian or vegan foods, also are gaining in popularity.

“The trends are mostly driven by healthy, premium, prepared and convenient,” says Carl H. Cappelli, senior vice president of sales and business development at Don’s Food Products in Schwenksville, PA. “Fresh is important. Healthy is important. Healthy versus value varies by consumers, but Millennials want both.

Grains continue to grow in popularity. Non-mayonnaise-based salads with a high source of fiber that meet vegetarian criteria also are gaining in popularity. Much of this is driven by growth in vegetarian and vegan diets. Asian Flavors are growing too.”

Even high animal protein dishes do better if they spare the sodium and fat.

“There is definitely a trend toward healthier items,” says Emily Blair, business development manager at Milliken & Company in Spartanburg, SC. “People want more meals on the go or at home without sacrificing quality. They want foods with high protein, low sodium and lower fats.”

Fresh is the byword when it comes to both vegetables and meats. “People want lots of fresh vegetables and high protein from fresh meats,” says Sean Norton, marketing communications manager at Milliken & Company.

