

HOW TO EXPAND THE FOODSERVICE MENU ACROSS DAYPARTS— While Keeping Costs Low

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, many retailers made moves to streamline operations and cut costs. Still, foodservice quality remains a top priority for retailers looking to recruit and retain customers—especially as municipalities reopen and vaccine availability contribute to increasing demand.

With convenience-store foodservice operations as much of a balancing act as ever, retailers need solutions to save time and money behind the scenes while continuing to offer a broad range of fresh, high-quality foodservice items that meet consumers' high expectations. Fortunately, cutting-edge kitchen technologies present a solution.

MENU VARIETY SUPPORTS SHOPPER RETENTION

While c-stores must continue to keep their margins high, recent market changes might offer an incentive for retailers to expand their foodservice menus.

According to Technomic's Q4 2020 C-Store Consumer Marketbrief, fuel customer conversion is up compared to earlier in the pandemic, with consumers



shopping c-store retail while they fuel up almost as often as they did before the pandemic. In addition, the majority of consumers who commuted before the pandemic, but worked from home during lockdowns, are once again commuting to work. Also, most c-store consumers say their financial outlook has improved since the pandemic's onset—making the prospect of stopping in for a drink or snack more appealing.

And even as foot traffic picks up, off-premise service continues to remain a popular option for c-store foodservice consumers. For consumers who are continuing to stay home, c-stores that offer a variety of foodservice options have an advantage in retaining repeat customers; offering variety gives

shoppers a reason to continue ordering foodservice at the drive-thru or for takeout and delivery.

In short, offering a diverse menu can help keep foodservice customers interested from week to week, however they choose to shop.

SOLUTIONS ACROSS DAYPARTS

More consumers resuming their normal routines means an increased need for offerings at each meal. Whether it's the morning or evening rush or shoppers stopping in on their lunch break, offering high-quality options for breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks is a great way to keep consumers coming in around the clock.

However, as retailers expand the

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menu across dayparts, add new offerings and elevate food quality, they must also keep labor and operational efficiency in mind. For this purpose, frontrunning kitchen technologies can make a world of difference.

THE COMBI OVEN ADVANTAGE

Unless retailers seek simplifying solutions, introducing new recipes to the menu can complicate training for new hires and established employees alike, as well as slow down everyday kitchen operations in general. With many c-store staffs already stretched thin, simplifying back-of-house prep can be a lifesaver.

Combi ovens from RATIONAL not only simplify the food-prep process by allowing employees to cook a wide variety of foods at the touch of a button, but they also ensure that food is cooked perfectly every time.

This keeps food quality high and labor low while decreasing stress for employees on the job—even during the busiest hours.

In addition to optimizing prep time, combi ovens also make efficient use of space. Unlike other kitchen technologies dedicated to preparing only a few recipes, combi ovens from RATIONAL can make delicious food of all types for every daypart and meal part. Plus, RATIONAL combis take up less than 11 square feet of space, and they're easy to install into a c-store's current floorplan, even when space is at a premium.

Combi ovens can add variety and enhance the quality of food across dayparts—from fresh-baked items and breakfast to go, to pizzas and a la carte items for lunch, to fried chicken and Mexican food favorites for dinner and more. With a combi in the kitchen, retailers are

prepared to deliver on whatever their consumer base is craving—while offering peak freshness and fast service every time.

TECHNOLOGIES KEEP KITCHENS FLEXIBLE

Especially as the pandemic continues to make demand for c-store foodservice unpredictable from day to day and hour to hour, c-stores can face a catch-22 when it comes to deciding how much food to prepare: Underpreparing results in extended wait times and lost sales, and overpreparing results in wasted food and increased costs.

Batch flexibility is another key benefit of using combi ovens. RATIONAL combi ovens allow retail employees to prepare fresh food in different batch sizes to meet fluctuations in demand without adding more work to the back-of-house. Retailers can even keep small batches of fresh-made items, such as baked goods, on display at the register to boost basket sizes.

In addition, retailers can prepare food ahead of time and hold it at peak freshness in the combi oven until it's ready to serve. Whether preparing on-demand or in advance, combi ovens keep wait times and food waste to a minimum.

In these unprecedented circumstances, c-store retailers need cutting-edge solutions to compete for consumers' dollars. To learn more about how technologies from RATIONAL, including the iCombi Pro and iCombi Classic, can enable c-stores to expand their foodservice menus without increasing costs and labor visit [rational-online.com](https://www.rational-online.com)