

# How High-Quality Foodservice Drives C-Store Profitability



The convenience store food landscape has been noticeably changing over the past few years. Increasingly, consumers are looking beyond restaurants and grocery stores to c-stores for fresh and high-quality meal items at all times of day—think baked goods in the morning, deli sandwiches in the afternoon and rotisserie chicken for take-home dinner.

Data around consumer behavior confirms this new trend. When choosing a location to visit for retail meal solutions, 90% of consumers say that the taste and flavor of food is important or very important; 90% say the same about food quality, according to Technomic's Consumer Brand Metrics, Q4, 2017. This means that c-stores must focus on offering quality, craveable foodservice offerings around the clock.

Freshness is also a high-ranked quality for creating value at foodservice locations as well. Some 75% of consumers say it is important to them, while 48% say variety is important, Technomic's 2017 Value & Pricing report finds. What's more, 37% of consumers say they are seeking out higher-quality menu options at restaurants more now than they were two years ago, according to the same report; this focus on quality is likely to translate to c-store foodservice expectations as well.

## MARKET FACTORS

The shift in eating selections at c-stores can be attributed to a variety of factors. For one, traditional c-store staples—gasoline, cigarettes and beer—are facing declining margins. Also, c-stores' distinguishing attributes of convenience and longer hours are no longer exceptional in today's competitive, 24/7 world, especially as takeout and delivery continue to soar in the restaurant world.

Similarly, other segments, such as grocery stores, have adjusted their hours and offerings to appeal to consumers' needs. The outcome of these developments is that c-stores must put more emphasis on high-quality food offerings, encroaching on other segments—most notably restaurants, and specifically those in the quick-service sector.




## GENERATIONAL INFLUENCE

The shift in demographic patronage has a lot to do with these altered appetites. Millennials and Gen Z, who were raised in the era of organic foods and the healthy food movement, are expecting more in terms of quality from c-store eats. This is especially important for retailers since younger consumers are consistent c-store customers: Nearly half of all consumers (48%) say they purchase foods or beverages from c-stores at least once a month; these numbers are higher among younger consumers. A total of 65% of Gen Z and 67% of millennials say they purchase foods from c-stores at least monthly, according to Technomic's 2018 Generational report.

So how are c-stores adapting to these new trends and expectations? They are setting themselves apart with delicious options. One chain that is setting the bar is Parker's Convenience Stores, which has 53 locations throughout coastal Georgia and the South Carolina Lowcountry and offers tasty hot Southern foods, such as made-from-scratch mac

and cheese and Southern-style chicken. Another chain setting themselves apart is Rutter's, a regional chain based in York, Pa., which prides itself on its local, sustainable produce, fresh restaurant menu offerings and support of local farmers and food producers.



Declining margins for gasoline, beer and cigarettes

**67%**  
of millennials say they purchase foods from c-stores at least monthly





## A SMART OVEN

Technology provides an important vehicle for c-stores to deliver high-quality, tasty food. It also allows stores to expand their menu offerings to items such as fresh breakfast options like bacon, sausage and eggs, flavorful and freshly prepared sandwiches (including pastrami sandwiches) and take-home dinners. Finally, it can help grow stores' sales and profits.

A combi oven, such as the RATIONAL SelfCookingCenter®, is a cooking appliance that suits a c-store environment. It cooks quickly, is easy to use, delivers a specific food quality and saves time, money and energy.

This system also boasts four intelligent functions which allow for the proper cooking and preparation of food:

- 1 It recognizes the size and condition of the products as well as the quantity loaded, and prepares food to desired specifications.**
- 2 It allows different foods, such as breaded or pre-fried products, meatballs, grilled vegetables, pizza or other baked goods, to be prepared at the same time. Depending on the load size, quantity and duration of door openings, it adjusts the cooking times to the relevant food.**
- 3 It provides highly sensitive sensors that detect and evaluate the current conditions in the cooking cabinet every second and adapt energy levels to meet the food requirements.**
- 4 It offers a unique, automatic cleaning system that can work overnight.**

Ready to start offering customers **upgraded food options** and increasing sales and traffic? Contact RATIONAL today to **learn more about the combi oven options** that are right for your store.



## ADAPTABILITY

Combi ovens such as the SelfCookingCenter® help to accommodate a c-store's limitations on time, space and labor. As time is a premium, intelligent cooking functions allow for the preparation of a variety of food for the hot counter in just an hour—perfect for the breakfast and lunch rushes. And, cooking foods such as prime rib, brisket and short ribs overnight saves retailers time during the day because production occurs during the nighttime hours when traffic is much slower—in other words, staff can spend their time on other tasks.

Here's another time-saving example: Perfectly roasted chickens can be prepared in a single SelfCookingCenter® in just 35 minutes. Best of all, even untrained staff can produce delicious roasted chickens—they simply need to press "roasted chicken" and the cooking process starts. The ability to elevate the types of foods being offered, without having to invest in significant training, is highly beneficial to retailers.

Additionally, retailers can use every rack in the SelfCookingCenter® at one time to prepare a number of dishes, including pizza, chicken wings, chicken nuggets, burgers, fries, potato wedges and more. Not only is it fast, but it's also more efficient than using multiple ovens and cooking methods at one time.

To assist busy employees who may be handling multiple tasks at one time, the SelfCookingCenter® notifies workers when a rack is finished cooking, too. It corrects cooking times depending on how much food is being cooked, and adjusts time and temperature based on how often the oven door is opened and shut (and for how long).

The simple control panel can be customized to make it easy for staff to use. For instance, controls can be as easy as pressing the "poultry" button to prepare perfectly roasted chicken – juicy on the inside with beautiful golden brown skin on the outside. These easy controls practically eliminate user error.

When cooking items, like chicken, there's no need for hood space. The RATIONAL UltraVent Plus hood captures steam vapors, grease and the lingering smoke that builds up while grilling and roasting.

RATIONAL also offers a networking solution that enables new or updated recipes to be rolled out to all the combis across all locations at the same time. This feature also enables staff to turn on and check on the combi from a smartphone, tablet or PC.

C-stores have a major task to undertake in upgrading their food offerings. Attracting younger consumers means catering to their desires for healthier and better tasting foods. Combis can help prepare higher quality, moist chicken for salads, freshly baked multi-grain breads, and made-to-order pizzas and hoagie sandwiches. Simple roller grill snacks aren't enough anymore, and for retailers that want to upgrade their offerings without investing in a huge portfolio of equipment, combi ovens are a great solution. Combi ovens such as the SelfCookingCenter® position c-stores to take the fresh, healthy and high-quality food segment by storm.

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