



# Selling Celebrations

How to maximize sales and traffic in the deli and bakery during the long holiday stretch.

By Lynn Petrak

**T**here's no place like home for the holidays, unless it's the local supermarket. Where, after all, do most people head when preparing to entertain for the season that extends roughly from Halloween through New Year's Day? The grocery store is the hub of many people's lives during the fall and early-winter holiday season, as shoppers make their grocery lists and check them twice. Given today's increasingly busy lifestyles, in which purchases are driven by convenience, value, quality and variety, the grocery deli and bakery have proved particularly appealing to consumers looking to make meal occasions both special and easy.

Various studies have confirmed consumers' dual interest in homespun, homemade foods and in making meals as fast and easy as possible. For example, a survey from National Public Radio's food page, The Salt, found that more than half (55 percent) of people said that holiday cooking is "equal parts fun and stressful," compared with the 36 percent who said that cooking for the holidays is fun, and the 9 percent who lamented that it's just stressful.

According to Jay Cipra, president of the Beloit, Wis.-based Broaster Co., which offers pressure fryers, foodservice equipment and branded food programs, retailers can step in to provide homemade



tastes so people can savor the holidays. "With time for family and friends an ever-shrinking resource, preservation of that time during the fall season and the holidays it brings has become of great importance. We find that families and groups still desire to maintain that connection to entertaining, but don't have the time to spend hours in the kitchen preparing meals," says Cipra, adding that the company's most popular items in the fourth quarter are its Broasterie Turkey and Genuine Broaster Chicken.



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What's more, fall and holiday offerings in the deli and bakery departments appeal to a sought-after, hard-to-pin-down demographic: Millennials. According to original research from the Madison, Wis.-based International-Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association (IDDBA), Millennials are more likely to shop the deli than other generational groups, although members of Generation Y are also discerning in their tastes, including what they eat for special occasions like holiday meals.

As Chris Zagorski, analyst for Schaumburg, Ill.-based Nielsen Perishables Group, noted at a recent IDDBA event: "Select retailers are making it worth the time and money to splurge in the deli, as consumers are willing to wait and pay to indulge on a variety of meal options from the deli. It is not unusual to see gourmet options such as prime rib, pork tenderloin and stuffed salmon taking up space behind the glass."

### Meals to Go

It's one thing to offer full holiday meals or to create special-order desserts for fall holidays like Halloween (which falls on a weekend this year), Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas and New Year's Eve. It's another thing entirely to merchandise effectively everything a store has to offer in its deli department, prepared food area and in-store bakery.

One way to reach shoppers is to give them what they want in terms of products. To that end,



Thanksgiving is a great example of how many grocery stores are providing both side dishes and entire meals for those who can't or don't want to slave away in their own kitchens.

Many retailers offer the whole gamut for Turkey Day, from soup to nuts — or, as the case may be, from butternut squash soup to pecan pumpkin pie. Lakeland, Fla.-based Publix Super Markets Inc. and Wegmans Food Markets, in Rochester, N.Y., for example, offer full holiday dinners, in which customers can place orders in advance and pick up fully cooked Thanksgiving feasts. The meals include traditional fare like roast turkey, gravy, mashed potatoes, stuffing, green bean casserole and cranberry orange chutney.

Other retailers that offer turkey dinners include Albertsons, Bi-Lo, Copps, Harris Teeter, H-E-B, Hy-Vee, Kroger, Price Chopper, Raley's, Safeway, ShopRite and Winn-Dixie. Specialty grocers that focus on natural or fresh foods also tout their ready-to-go Thanksgiving meals with a gourmet or specialty twist, like Whole Foods Market and Sprouts; Whole Foods, for its part, offers gluten-free, organic and vegan menu choices for Thanksgiving and Christmas, albeit at higher price points than those of meals at conventional supermarkets.

### Clicking With Customers

In today's click-and-it-will-come world, ordering online for easy pickup and even delivery is also catching on with shoppers. According to research from Nielsen and Booz & Co., online grocers are projected to account for 11 percent of food purchases by 2025.

Retailers with click-and-collect programs can promote the ease of ordering groceries, including deli and bakery items. For example, Lowe's Foods, in Winston-Salem, N.C., recently updated its click-and-collect program with Toronto-based technology provider Unata, through which users can order through a personalized homepage, browse products by attribute and check out in-store discounts. To make entertaining even more effortless, home delivery businesses like San Francisco-based Instacart are teaming up with retailers (including Whole Foods in some areas) to bring meals to families, even on Thanksgiving Day.



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Buehler's Fresh  
Foods

### More in Store

In addition to providing an array of meal solutions for fall and winter holidays, retailers generally ramp up their promotional and educational efforts during the season, which can mean the difference between black and red ink for the calendar year. Getting the word out on how the deli, prepared food department and bakery can make entertaining and even weeknight dining easier during that busier-than-usual stretch of time from late October through early January is pivotal to maximizing sales in the store, especially when consumers have so many choices when it comes to heat-and-eat, take-home and ready-to-eat foods.

Traditional merchandising tools like in-store signage — such as signs in the deli that list what's in a full Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner — are a way to directly reach shoppers at the point of sale. Increasingly, though, many grocers are taking advantage of social media and various digital tools to reach shoppers at the point of planning; such tools



## Season's Eatings: Fall Holidays Fill Up Last Quarter

Once upon a time, Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas were holidays that defined the merchandising months of October, November and December. These days, when Halloween candies debut on shelves in late August and Christmas merchandise appears in September, the last quarter of the year has become a flurry of activity in terms of seasonal products and promotions.

Jay Cipra, president of the Beloit, Wis.-based Broaster Co., has witnessed this growing occasion overlap. “Yes, there has become a ‘downhill run’ of holiday activity in the last 45 days of the year, which tends to sweep Halloween into the mix,” he affirms. “Retailers continually strive to be first to the market with promotions to capture consumers’ interest, and this keeps pushing back promotional activity.”

can be as simple as a Facebook page or Twitter feed. Mobile apps are another way to reach out to customers via smartphone and tablet as they're making decisions about seasonal needs.

Offering cooking classes with holiday dishes is another way to connect with shoppers who switch up their cooking preferences and habits during this time of year. H-E-B's Central Market stores in Texas, for instance, offer a variety of in-store cooking classes, as do Ahold USA's Giant Food Stores and many others around the country, including both chain and regional stores.

One of the fundamental merchandising tools is getting shoppers to try a product. Whether it's offering a taste of a holiday-style ham or setting out portions of just-baked pumpkin bread, sampling is a direct merchandising tactic at the point of sale.

Cross-merchandising is another traditional tool that can be effective for spurring product sales for a variety of occasions. This time of year, when

CPG companies offer more seasonal products, provides a great opportunity to pair up those items to encourage shopping across both the center store and the perimeter.

At Wooster, Ohio-based Buehler's Fresh Foods, cross-merchandising is part of the holiday plan. "We help the guest by making entertaining easy, like cross-merchandising the proper wine or cracker with the cheese," says Mike Merritt, chef and director of food production.

Changing displays to meet consumers' needs at this hectic time of year is another way to merchandise for seasonal success, according to Merritt. "You can reset cases to allow more room for larger pack items," he suggests. "This could be for grab-and-go appetizers or party trays to go."

Another idea he puts forward is to enhance displays by incorporating items that work as well for gifts as they do for entertaining. "Think of foodie gift ideas: What would we like to get as a gift? Put a colored bow on it," he notes.

In regard to CPGs, retailers can feature and promote seasonal items to boost enthusiasm for the holidays, whether it's Halloween-hued packaged goods like refrigerated ready-to-bake cookies or seasonally seasoned items in the deli, such as spiced cranberry relish. In addition to using materials and ideas that CPGs provide for their seasonal items and products that peak around the holidays, retailers can deploy their own in-store merchandising tools to maximize shopper interest and strike while the iron is hot.

Finally, as helpful as technology is, the personal interaction is pivotal this time of year. Merritt, for instance, cites staffing the specialty cheese area with an in-store expert. "Start conversations off with 'What are you planning on making?'" he says. "This opens the floodgates to upgrade their cheese selections." **PG**