



Becoming a Grocerant

Equipment is key in developing into a retail foodservice destination.

By Bob Ingram

In the shape-shifting world of food retailing, the one constant is change.

Today's supermarkets are now competing with recognized traditional foodservice operators, and as Jeff Schneider, SVP of sales and marketing at Muskegon, Mich.-based Structural Concepts Corp., asserts: "Supermarkets have to establish credibility that they offer a restaurant-quality experience for dine-in or takeout meals. They need to become a grocerant."

According to Schneider, one of the most dramatic ways of doing this is to make prepared foods highly visible so customers can see — and smell — for themselves how good the food is.

"Sophisticated operators like Whole Foods have a well-developed vision of how they want to present their prepared food, so we work with them to create customized display fixtures to support their specific menu and décor," he notes.

Structural Concepts recently introduced the Grocerant Series of modulated food bar merchandisers, designed to give retailers highly customized displays that are more cost-effective and delivered in shorter lead times. The Grocerant Series blends seamlessly with the company's other merchandising systems built on the proprietary Alignnext platform, which creates minimalist integrated prepared food departments by eliminating what Schneider calls "trainwreck" lineups.

Easy Integration

At Charlotte, N.C.-based Electrolux Professional Inc., Director of Marketing Angelo Grillas says: "We integrate our equipment into packages that make life easier for our customers. A combi-oven can stand independently, but works more efficiently when paired with a blast chiller and used as a system."

New retail foodservice equipment from Electrolux includes the Tower of Power, a compact cook-and-chill



COOKING GOOD
The Electrolux Professional Pressure Braising Pan retains product yield and cooks fast.

solution with a 3-foot footprint, which offers retailers the ability to plan today, cook today and serve tomorrow, and preserves nutrients and product integrity safely per HACCP guidelines.

Also new are the Pressure Braising Pan to preserve product yield and cook in record time, and the High Speed Sandwich Press, which integrates cast iron grilling, infrared toasting and microwave cooking to produce consistently hot sandwiches in 60 seconds.

According to Rob Napkori, marketing manager of the commercial products division of Wilkes-Barre, Pa.-based InterMetro, a provider of prep-area products under the Metro brand, the company's SmartWall puts items within arm's reach for associates making take-home items for busy consumers.

"Our new C5 3-Series heated holding cabinets with Insulation Armour are being introduced to grocery chains for grab-and-go items in both full



and half sizes," he notes. "Our new MetroMax4 All Polymer Shelving System offers corrosion-proof performance, proven Metro stability and unrivaled value."

Prepared Food Evolution

Cheryl Beach, marketing communications manager at Bridge-ton, Mo.-based Hussmann Corp., points out that supermarket fresh prepared foods will be the top sales growth category —

an estimated 7.5 percent annually — in the in-store foodservice industry during the next decade.

"To achieve this sales growth," she says, "retailers' prepared foods departments are changing and attracting shoppers by cooking to order, offering more variety in food choices, and incorporating healthier, customized meal solutions."

In the past year, sales growth at Hussman has come from the Q Series and ISLA refrigerated display merchandisers, particularly within the fresh perimeter. "Our Q Series has an upscale styling,

with designs that can be configured into a gourmet prepared foods department," notes Beach. "We are seeing demand for multiple display levels within both the service and self-service displays as retailers are increasing variety and offering more choices to shoppers."

The ISLA family of products offers various island configurations that let the retailer determine the combination of hot, dry, and refrigerated modules that work best for a particular store. "Our ISLA islands can be used to extend the prepared food offerings away from the perimeter wall and into the center store, or even at the front, providing quick, easy and convenient access to snacks or mini meals for the daypart shopper," observes Beach.

Store size, interior layout and product mix will all change over the next five years, she predicts, as Millennial and Generation Z consumers demand traditional brick-and-mortar stores to be more connected to them while delivering personalized meal solutions.

Controlling Costs

In Beloit, Wis., Chad Vendette, director of marketing at Broaster Co., highlights among the vendor's products Pressure Fryers, designed to cook food in a fraction of the time of open fryers. "Not only are they built for producing Genuine Broaster Chicken, but [they] can be used to cook a wide range of other products," Vendette notes.

The SmartTouch touchscreen controller is a new addition to the Pressure Fryer that allows for easy and fast selection of product when cooking, and significantly reduces training time for new employees.

The cost to bring food to counters will continue to be a big concern in the future for supermarket foodservice operations, Vendette asserts, adding that items like energy costs, base food costs and labor will ratchet upwards and drive margins down. "We monitor industry information sources and stay ahead of trends to keep our customers in the profitable zone," he says.

"We provide simple stand-alone solutions all the way up to full-store advance control," says Mark Schmalz, business development manager, food retail, at Cleveland, Ohio-based Parker Hannifin, which offers mechanical and electronic controls to keep retail foodservice systems running smoothly.

The company recently launched an electronic conversion kit that converts a mechanical A8 or SPORT valve to a stepper motor-driven modulating valve, thereby eliminating the need for brazing because the valve body stays in the system piping. This application can save up to 15 percent on energy, according to Schmalz.

"We are seeing [a] trend to smaller store footprints, larger focus on fresh food, and more self-contained cases," he notes. "Due to these trends, we are develop-



ing solutions to address food preservation and electronic controls focused on diagnostics and reduced service costs."

Greater Adaptability

At Eaton, Ohio-based Henny Penny Corp., Dann Woellert, product manager for ovens and holding equipment, says, "The growth of prepared food items has allowed for more focus on flexible cooking equipment like our SpaceSaver Plus combi-oven, and on merchandising and display of deli products."

Woellert notes that the SpaceSaver combi-ovens are smaller versions of the FlexFusion line that can fit into smaller spaces. The stackable ovens offer productivity in a smaller footprint because of their ability to cook at different temperatures and conditions in the top or bottom oven.

"It is clear that prepared foods will grow in importance for retail foodservice," he says. "The trend of adding new flavors and dishes from around the world into delis will require more flexibility in cooking and more unique ways to serve and display these foods." **PG**



BROASTER BOOSTER
The SmartTouch touchscreen controller is an addition to Broaster's Pressure Fryer.