

The Grocerant Trend

Price Chopper's Market Bistro store is an example of how memorable guest experiences turn casual customers into brand ambassadors

By Angela Hanson

Convenience store foodservice programs don't only compete with each other. Grocery stores and restaurants are after the same consumer dollars. What's more, in recent years, Schenectady, N.Y.-based Price Chopper Supermarkets proved that a hybrid competitor — dubbed the “grocerant” — can do just as well. In fact, the grocerant is now defining the future of the grocery channel.

“Everyone has the opportunity to create memorable guest experiences, but you really have to design

it,” said Convenience Foodservice Exchange presenter Lewis Shaye, vice president of culinary concepts for Price Chopper. “It doesn't just happen.”

The more than 80-year-old company, which has 135 stores in six Northeast states, seized the opportunity to turn casual customers into brand ambassadors through its new Market Bistro and Market 32 grocerant concepts.

Located in Latham, N.Y., the 90,000-square-foot Market Bistro is both a prototype and a research-and-development store. “It's a real destination store,” Shaye said, adding that it exists where shopping and



The entryway to Bistro Boulevard welcomes customers to an “eater's paradise.” The feel is of a city market where individual shops have their own personalities, but operate in a common space.



The Veggies and Greens concept is a step up from traditional supermarket self-serve salad bars. All salads here are tossed to order, with more than 30 ingredients available.



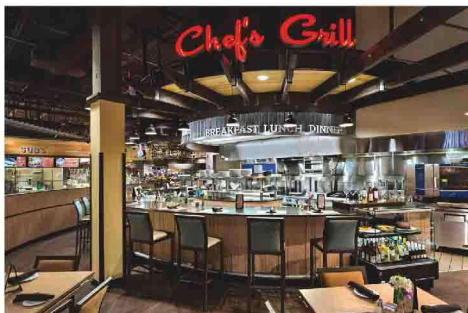
Fresh-made, 15-inch sub sandwiches use rolls from Market Bistro's own bakery, deli meat that is sliced daily at the store, and lettuce that is shredded on-site instead of bagged.



The Plump Hen and Smokehouse features hickory-smoked meats and hand-breaded fried chicken made on-site, highlighted by an optimized lighting scheme focused on the food.



Market Bistro's Fish Fry, Fresh Sushi and Seafood departments are positioned near each other because they complement one another.



The Chef's Grill offers full service via an open kitchen for all three meals of the day.



The "water wall" in the seafood department, a simulated movement generated by lighting that moves across the wavelike background, makes shopping more fun.



The Italian Market is the store's own version of Little Italy, offering a wide array of Italian favorites including meats and cheeses sliced to order, olives and olive oils.



Both pan pizza and New York-style thin crust pizza are available at the Stone Fired Pizza concept, alongside custom pizzas, specialty designer pies, plus the Mac and Cheese Bar.



The Artisan Breads and Pastry Shop is part of Market Bistro's commitment to making authentic breads, doughnuts, cakes, pies and more from scratch.

dining intersect.

To create Market Bistro, Price Chopper remodeled an existing location and added a cooking school as a bonus amenity. Through the planning process, the chain came up with more than 15 contemporary food concepts in both quick-casual and full-service formats, combined with a unique grocery store. And the concept of service

was deemed just as important.

"We use service as a differentiator," Shaye said, to transform customers into brand ambassadors by offering a memorable experience with a culture of above-and-beyond hospitality.

The planning process included brainstorming and traveling across the United States, and beyond its borders, getting inspiration

from mom-and-pop shops, farmers markets, and "best-in-class" regional chains. The end result: more than 2,000 recipes served up by Market Bistro's 15 food concepts.

A great deal of thought was likewise given to Market Bistro's seating and lighting in order to mimic a true restaurant experience. The various foodservice concepts within it offer mainstream menus with

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a mix of worldly adventure. Local is also a focus, with the supermarket's fresh ingredients used throughout the day in handmade food. Those ingredients are sourced from local partners whenever possible.

Market Bistro's "recipe for success" consists of three main parts: menu design and culinary work; kitchen and equipment design; and store design integration. Most importantly, Price Chopper assembled a project team with wide expertise in kitchen design, equipment selection, restaurant environmental design, store design and operations. In particular, knowledge of operations was critical to ensure the concept functioned well. **CSN**