

Rouses continues Southern expansion with experience-focused store

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Dive Brief:

- Rouses Markets will open an experience-focused store in western Mobile, Alabama this week, [according to The Shelby Report](#). This will be the chain's fifth store in the Mobile area since it entered the market in 2013.
- The new store will include a barbecue station with house-smoked meats, a Mongolian Grill, meal kits and a culinary center that will host classes, wine tastings and other events. The store also features a K-cup station that lets shoppers select from various flavors and build their own 24 pack.
- Rouses, based in Thibodeaux, Louisiana, plans to keep growing in Alabama, CEO Donny Rouse has told various news outlets. In addition to its Mobile stores, the company operates a store in Gulf Shores and will open a location in Orange Beach later this year that it took over from Winn-Dixie.



Dive Insight:

Rouses new store is a reminder that an experience-focused approach is the way forward for supermarkets. With shoppers' tastes evolving and competition from online sellers like Amazon increasing, stores have to give shoppers a reason to visit beyond the perfunctory weekly stock-up shop.

As The Hartman Group put it in a recent report, "There may be one barrier insurmountable to online food retailing: the emotional connection to in-store shopping." The consulting firm also referred to grocery shopping as an "act of love" for many consumers.

Offering a first-class experience isn't anything new for Rouses. The chain is fully integrated into the southern region it serves. It's the first place many shoppers go for crawfish, King cakes and a host of other regional specialties. Across categories like produce and seafood, local sourcing is the default procurement method for its buyers.

At the same time, the chain serves up delicacies from outside its home turf. Last month, Rouses sealed a pact with the Italian Trade Agency to offer an enhanced selection of wine, cheese, cured meats and other selections. In the lead-up to the deal, Rouses buyers traveled to Italy, sampled products and met the folks that make them.

Offering unique products and experiences can help insulate retailers against online grocery competitors. But even store-focused chains like Rouses have realized they need to have a presence in e-grocery. Earlier this year the company announced separate deals with Instacart and Shipt to offer home delivery from most of its locations along the Gulf Coast.

Although some regional grocers like Tops Markets have struggled lately, these operators have the advantage of deep roots and strong customer loyalty in the markets they serve. Rouses has leveraged both of these advantages, and in doing so has kept its leading position in the Deep South grocery scene.

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