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Hybrid products blur the lines between food and beverage flavors



Tricia Contreras · November 16, 2016



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Rising consumer demand for inventive, over-the-top foods and beverages is driving the growth of a new breed of dishes and drinks that combine two or more flavor profiles into one item.

This new class of hybrid products established itself on the popularity of a few restaurant items that became overnight sensations, such as the [Cronut](#) and Taco Bell's Doritos Locos Taco. The [foodservice](#) space is accustomed to limited-time offerings, allowing hybrid products to proliferate on restaurant menus over



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clear command of iconic flavor trends (mostly American) to endure the R+D

lifecycle from idea to shelf and reflect a moderately clean ingredient panel," said Melissa Abbott, vice president for culinary insights at The Hartman Group.

While clean labels are a top concern for consumers, the whimsical nature of fusion products appeals to consumers' sense of fun and positions them as indulgent treats. "We anticipate this type of playful hybridization to continue as a counterbalance to the 'fresh, less processed' movement," Abbott said.

Here's a look at some of the products defining this trend:

Two desserts are better than one

Dominique Ansel introduced the Cronut at his eponymous New York City bakery in 2013 and quickly patented the name after eateries all over the globe started baking their own takes on the immensely popular pastry. [Dunkin' Donuts](#) launched a Croissant Donut LTO in November the following year, and the item was such a success that it is now a part of the chain's permanent menu and comes in various flavors. The Cronut is responsible for launching not only a wave of croissant-doughnut copycats, but a whole category of hybrid desserts, Datassential writes in the August 2016 issue of its FoodBytes trend report. Items cited in the report include Oreo Churros, Mr. Holmes Bakery's Cruffin (croissant-muffin), the signature Brookie (brownie-cookie) from Las Vegas' Honey Salt and Au Bon Pain's CroisBun, which combines a croissant and a sweet bun.

In an opinion piece on [HungryForever.com](#), poster Anna laments the popularity of the Cronut and its various spinoffs. "We've seen so many different food hybrids that it's starting to get a little intense and also a little exhausting," she writes in the post, which also calls out sushi burritos, ramen burgers and rainbow bagels.

Snack foods, cereal carry the trend to packaged foods

With desserts being one of the major drivers of the hybrid category in foodservice, it makes sense that sweets would be one of the first categories to help the trend make the jump to packaged food. [Mondelēz](#) has been steadily growing the lineup of flavors for its Oreo cookie brand, which now includes



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the sandwich cookie will hit shelves in March of 2017, [Kerinery29](#) reported.

The candy-flavored cookies are just one example of co-branded hybrid products. [Kellogg Company](#) teamed up with [Dr Pepper Snapple Group](#) to launch Pop-Tarts with flavors inspired by A&W Root Beer and Crush Orange sodas earlier this year. [General Mills](#) will cash in on the popularity of Girl Scout Cookies with the January launch of its Caramel Crunch and Thin Mints cereals that emulate the flavors of the cookies, [Thrillist](#) reported.

Beverages take on the flavors of food

[Beverages](#) are another popular application for flavor fusions, with a wide array of drinks taking on the flavors of food. As with most hybrid offerings, dessert flavors are common. Milkshakes are a medium for a range of dessert-inspired flavors, from [Steak n Shake's](#) Oreo Red Velvet Milkshake to [Sonic's](#) new Sonic Blast Pecan Pie Flavor Funnel. [Starbucks](#) offers several coffee beverages that play on popular dessert flavors, such as its new seasonal Caramel Brulee Latte.

Bruleed flavors with notes of caramelized sugar are also showing up in cocktails, spice maker McCormick noted in its [2016 Flavor Forecast](#). The report also highlights other culinary cocktails such as drinks with roasted and browned flavors like the Roasted Peanut Old Fashioned made with vanilla-and-peanut infused bourbon.

These hybrid drinks take the idea of food-and-drink pairings to the next level by infusing the flavor of a food that might normally be served alongside a beverage into the drink itself, Maya Zuniga, director of innovation for S&D Coffee & Tea told [Food Business News](#) in an interview earlier this year.

"We did a coffee crawl where they were taking donuts, soaking them in milk, and using the liquid that came out of that after it steeped and combining that into coffee. Imagine having your Fruity Pebbles in a latte. Marry a cinnamon roll into a coffee, and how good would that be?" she said.

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