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Snacks eat into meals' share of eating occasions

Consumers snack for nourishment, optimization and pleasure

Julie Gallagher | Mar 07, 2017

Of the vast majority of Americans (91%) who snack multiple times per day, 8% forgo meals altogether in favor of snacking, finds Hartman Group's Future of Snacking 2016 report.

“How we go about planning, acquiring and consuming food has been disrupted, and the result has been the displacement of meals

and variations in when, how and what gets consumed,” said Tamara Barnett, VP of strategic insights for Bellevue, Wash.-based Hartman Group, during a webinar presentation of the findings.

“It’s due to time pressure and commitments and the decline of meal planning and cooking skills, and the democratization of planning, shopping and cooking. When you don’t know who [in the house] will be planning the meal, it can introduce chaos.”

Hartman Group outlines three main drivers of snacking occasions, which tend to overlap. They are snacking for nourishment to help meet daily sustenance (56% of all snacking); snacking for optimization to help fulfill mental and

physical performance (34%); and snacking for pleasure or to fulfill emotional desires for enjoyment, craving and comfort (49%).

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“Millennials in particular use snacking to ensure sustained energy to get through the day, and eat more snacks to help manage their appetite,” said Barnett. “They think of snacking as a strategy to maintain nourishment in a way that older cohorts may not.” Yogurts, granola bars, whole fruits and vegetables, water and smoothies tend to be consumed during an occasion where nourishment is among the goals, Barnett said.

Snacking for optimization or to manage alertness and focus, which can include drinking a cup of coffee, also skews toward 20- and 30-something shoppers. “Across the board, due to active lifestyles, Millennials really make refueling and energy pick-me-ups



important,” Barnett said. Snacking for pleasure, meanwhile, is implicit for a majority of eating occasions since people want to eat snacks that taste good.

Snack providers

Americans are obtaining snacks from a number of places ranging from traditional grocery stores to online subscription services and even their workplace. Food retail is the source for 81% of snacking occasions, down 4 percentage points from 2012, according to Hartman Group. Meanwhile, 11% of snacking occasions are sourced from foodservice, up 4 percentage point vs. 2012.

Foodservice is also a growing source of immediate consumption snacks. This type of snacking is defined by Hartman as an eating occasion in which at least some items for that occasion were

purchased within an hour of consumption. Eighteen percent of snacks are considered immediate consumption, up 5 percentage points since 2012.

Thirty two percent of immediate consumption snacks are sourced from foodservice, up 11 percentage points since 2012. Another growing source of immediate consumption snacks is the workplace, up 10 percentage points to 16% vs. five years ago. This would include food sourced from a work cafeteria or catering that's been brought into the workplace.

Supermarkets can grow their snack share by offering solutions that align with snacking drivers. "The future of snacking demands that companies think about development from a needs-based perspective. Orient your offerings to at least one of the fundamental drivers of nourishment, optimization or pleasure. A clear point of differentiation that aligns to one of the three will be critical for really providing a value proposition that connects with consumers," said Barnett.

Snack marketers should also consider freshness, since it signals quality, and think about whether their snack package design jibes with how a snack will be consumed. Can it enable a mobile lifestyle, for instance, asked Barnett.

She urges food retailers in particular to optimize store layouts and product assortments in a way that services and even inspires snacking occasions. Supermarkets must also strike a balance between products that reflect freshness and quality with more indulgent, processed snacks that are marketed by iconic brands.

“There is really an opportunity for retailers to disrupt expectations by really making moves to overlap with foodservice in ways that are believable, and deliver on quality and experience,” Barnett said. “Retailers understand that their competition is not just a channel war, so can you disrupt expectations and compete with foodservice or at least overlap with it in some compelling way?”

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