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RIDING THE THIRD WAVE, IT'S PERSONAL



A Letter from the President and CEO

Leslie G. Sarasin

Shoppers no longer go to supermarkets for food and products—they arrive expecting an experience with readily available information about all aspects of their food.

Futurist Alvin Toffler called it correctly back in 1980, when he described the third wave of human society development as being the information age. However, even he could not have predicted the wild twirling and gyrating we all must do to remain upright while trying to surf this third wave. So many currents and crosscurrents to this wave occur that food retailers must be both shrewd and strategic about addressing its challenges, not the least of which is managing consumer expectations about information because it appears to have an Erysichthonic quality to it. King Erysichthon of mythic Greek lore bore a curse such that the more he ate, the hungrier he became. Consumer appetite for

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information seems insatiable; the more provided, the more desired. Shoppers no longer go to supermarkets for food and products—they arrive expecting an experience with readily available information about all aspects of their food. Plus, they have higher expectations that their food products are handled, presented and delivered in the most informed way possible.



In the 2016 version of FMI's U.S. Grocery Shopper Trends, FMI and our research partners, the Hartman Group, dug deeper into the fact that more Americans are involved in food shopping than ever before, with 85 percent of all U.S. adults saying they have at least 50 percent of the household responsibility for grocery shopping. Self-shoppers, those purchasing food for their single household, make up 24 percent of grocery customers. Those living in a multi-person household, but serving as the sole shopper for the family, make up about 18 percent of grocery shoppers. All the rest, nearly 60 percent of shoppers, are involved in some form of negotiated co-shopping or shared shopping approach to buying groceries. And not surprisingly, every household handles that negotiation a little differently, a fact I will explore in more detail when I present the "The Ins and Outs of Shopper Thinking: an Exploration of 2016 U.S. Grocery Shopper Trends" at FMI Connect in Chicago in June.

The increased number of shoppers per household has resulted in shoppers frequenting more channels, with newer channels (supercenters, conventional discount, limited assortment and dollar stores) strengthening their ability to attract shoppers in 2016. With more shoppers, more channels, more variables in the mix, customers seek help navigating the negotiation process in households where there are differences in taste, varying nutritional attitudes and diverse economic approaches to shopping. The rather intriguing irony is, the more complex the shopping equation becomes, the more households look for personal solutions. For food retailers, successfully embracing the information age means using the wealth of available data in a host of ways. Clearly, this information has practical implications for improving production and increasing efficiencies in the way we physically manage stock rotation, deliver goods, and handle checkout. But there's much more to it than that.

The thing we dare not overlook is the fundamental way the availability of technology and information has forever changed our lives, most notably in the social arena of connecting with people. It is not

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incidental that while our handheld device offers the wisdom of the universe at our fingertips, its primary use remains connecting us with friends and family through social networks. Technology and information find their real power when it becomes personal—enabling us to make a meaningful connection. The food retailers who are tube-riding the third wave are finding the ways technology can make food personal to the customer. They are innovating to help shoppers discover that new flavor, guiding them to the nutritional resources that answer their family's specific dietary needs, connecting them to that product the kids will eat, making it easier for them to exchange logistical shopping information with household partners, and best of all, simplifying the dutiful part of shopping so there is more time and energy for the freedom of exploration.

What comes through in Trends loudly and clearly is that consumers trust their local food store to provide safe food products, and that shoppers consider their store a significant ally in achieving family wellness goals. As we learn algorithmically how to better mine the data we already have available to intensify our customers' retail experience and provide a more personal engagement with their food, this level of trust will grow. And as trust grows, so does loyalty.

In short, successfully riding the third wave means making it personal.

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