

[foodbusinessnews.net/articles/11698-the-evolution-of-convenience](https://www.foodbusinessnews.net/articles/11698-the-evolution-of-convenience)

The evolution of convenience

04.24.2018 By Monica Watrous

MIAMI — Recall the Swanson TV Dinners of the 1950s, the American housewife's solution for a no-fuss family meal and a symbol of ease, accessibility and speed. While these traditional tenets of convenience remain important, today's consumer expectations of convenience have evolved to reflect modern cultural values, said Laurie Demeritt, chief executive officer of The Hartman Group.

"Convenience currently is the No. 1 need articulated by consumers across all eating occasions," Ms. Demeritt said during The Hartman Group's Food Culture Forecast 2018 summit on April 19 in Miami.

American families today spend more hours working, commuting and taking care of children. Even younger generations grapple with stress and anxiety, Ms. Demeritt noted. As a result, consumers are skipping meals, seeking shortcuts and snacking more than ever. "Convenience is a need that goes across demographics and occasions," she said.



While the desire for convenience has increased over time, the historic expectations of reliability, efficiency, uniformity and predictability no longer resonate with today's time-starved shopper. Rather, convenient snacks and meal solutions must offer health and wellness, experience, authenticity and distinction, Ms. Demeritt said.

"Quick, easy and accessible are still important, but perhaps even more important now is the engagement, the empowerment ... and flexibility," she said. "This is much more in alignment with how consumers feel about food today, which is a much deeper connection than they have in the past."

Empowerment means consumers today desire some involvement in meal preparation, which may include combining shelf-stable items and fresh products to create a unique eating experience.



"Consumers want to explore and experiment, but they want a little help along the way," Ms. Demeritt said.

Engagement, another component of modern convenience, involves discovery, creativity and customization. Two-thirds of convenience-driven occasions include a need for flavor distinction, Ms. Demeritt said. An example is overnight oats, a nutritious and customizable breakfast trend that has inspired recent product development from brands including Quaker and Dave's Naturals.

Another aspect of modern convenience is flexibility, which encompasses packaging design, portability and portion size. Examples include single-serve apple cider vinegar shots and powdered bone broth mixes, which deliver health benefits for consumers on the go.

In food service, bowls, a popular menu trend, particularly in the fast-casual restaurant segment, tap into a number of modern convenience cues, including variety, customization, fresh and healthy ingredients, global flavors and portability.

“Q.S.R.s today are not just putting out those old convenience cues but are starting to incorporate some of the new convenience cues to stay relevant,” Ms. Demeritt said, citing as an example McDonald’s Corp., which in recent months has adapted to changing consumer tastes with the launches of fresh beef patties, all-day breakfast and new Big Mac sizes.

Similarly, grocery retailers must continue to innovate beyond the rotisserie chicken to continue to meet new standards for convenience, Ms. Demeritt said, noting deli prepared foods and in-store meal kits as opportunities.

“Convenience today is not just about the product or service,” she said. “There’s a physicality to the product that’s important — how you make it, how you cook it, where you buy it. But there’s also a lot going on around that. So (consider) the whole experience... purchasing it, using it, and let’s not forget about disposing it as well.”

