

# Food service – are you in the game?

Are you truly invested in the rising trend of sourcing ready-to-eat or ready-to-heat food away from home?

By Hippo Zourides

The days of selling some cold meats and cheeses from a delicatessen in your supermarket are over!

If your store is not catering to the needs of your clientele by supplying the correct range of home replacement meals, you should be re-looking at your food service delivery mechanism.

The US retail industry has defined food service into four clear-cut categories that easily apply to the South African environment. The categories are:

**Essential services** – outlets that offer basic sliced meats, some hot meals and chilled ready-to-eat meals.

**Standard bearer services** – are defined as those who sell ready-to-eat and ready-to-heat foods from a serviced counter or self-service display or as ready-to-go options.

**Destination services** – are the outlets with café-style seating, well-trained staff and a dynamic prepared foods programme.

**Food service specialists** – are those outlets that are restaurant-like with proper sit-down facilities, limited table service, gourmet menu items, a warm atmosphere and a kitchen manned by skilled



culinary professionals. In the US, they have coined a new word for these outlets, 'grocerants'.

So, where are you positioned in this range of food services?

## The market

When did you last analyse your target market for food services? It may well vary from the overall aim of the supermarket. Are you located in a suburban area? Do you cater for the lunch and dinner trade only? Are there any offices or factories nearby?

Do you cater for millennials or maybe for single senior citizens? You may be catering for a whole lot of these target markets combined.

Use all the input from your store team to decide on what makes your market. Do not just go with your own gut feeling. Speak to your service department staff about items requested by customers; speak to a variety of shoppers and not only concentrate on the female gender. Pop into the local school or business centre or factory and ask the people

what they are looking for. Visit your competitors and see how they cater. Visit local take-aways and restaurants and profile their offering to decide what you should be serving.

Are you on social media to outline your food service offering? Statistics from the US indicate that 50% of mobile users and 34% of computer users are likely to visit a store offering food services after searching for aspects such as location, trading hours, offers, meals, etc. ... Up to 19% of those surveyed said they undertook an unplanned visit





### The offering

Have you involved your catering/cooking team in the correct selection of equipment? Are they able to do their job without hinderance? That expensive veg slicer may cost a lot, but is an essential tool for your chef or head cook!

What is the quality of your staff in food service delivery? Did you merely take someone off the street who claimed to have some cooking experience, or did you subject that person to a proper test to assess his/her cooking capabilities? Did you check past references? Are key people able to be good staff trainers, or are they just a brilliant one-man/woman show incapable of sharing their knowledge or upgrading their skills of their teams?

to a store with foodservice and bought on impulse.

Millennials are looking for great taste, menu diversification and convenience, when choosing your outlet over others.

Do you need outside help from a professional chef for a short-term period to define a decent menu for your requirements?

Food costing is an important exercise at the start of the process and continuous monitoring of the ingredient costs is required. Restaurants are able to mark up to 100% on the cost of ingredients, but supermarkets may be forced to be more competitive. However, remember the adage

“ The customer will remember the quality of your food long after having forgotten about the price ”



**GRAIN FIELD  
CHICKENS**

If your location can sustain it, there is no reason why you should not aim higher with your margins to cover for mark-downs and wastage.

When designing your menu, consider the obvious meals of the day: breakfast, lunch and dinner. But spend some time considering snacking options. Many people eat four to five times per day to follow specific eating plans and you could be catering for those needs.

When did you last taste the food that is produced in your offering? Are you able to serve to your guests at home as if it was prepared in your home kitchen? This is a vital aspect of your success. Be proud of what your store supplies and boast about it to all and sundry.

Beware of stagnation. Many food service offerings rely on the same old favourites and food innovation is truly lacking in the South African context.

Be extravagant and try different offerings, such as cuisine from China, Mexico, Thailand, Greece, India, etc. ... At least try it for a period and see if it works for your environment.

Adopt an LTO policy – limited time offers are a great promotional tool to push volumes of a given recipe to widen the appeal to people who would normally not buy that item. Tasters are a must! Do not skimp on this and do not worry about people wanting a free meal. The samples must be small, but enough to give the customer a good taste of the offering.

Seventy percent of US shoppers feel good about shopping in a store that has a great food service offering. The same should apply to our country.

What about deliveries? Do you use your own scooter service, or an outsourced one (UberEATS, Mr. D are good options)? One point to remember: the outsourced delivery companies demand quite a chunk of your margin for their services, so do not hesitate to price a delivered product at a premium price as compared to the price in-store. Those using this service are aware of the differential.

Food service plays a vital part in the mix of a modern supermarket. Ensure that you are catering for your clientele according to their current needs and you are bound to be successful. **SR**

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