

Convenience Is More Important Than Ever

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AS CITIES START to open again, convenience is more important than ever.

Many Americans have become accustomed to eating in their car as indoor dining is still not at full capacity. Bite-sized snacks and easy-to-grab-and-go meals are more important now whether they are needed during a morning commute or a road trip.

Taking a deep dive into Datassential's *2021 Convenience Store Keynote*, we can begin to understand the attitudes toward the market, as operators are still trying to navigate COVID-19 and added restrictions.

But First, Breakfast

It is said that breakfast is the most important meal of the day, and the emphasis is evident as we look at c-stores. According to Datassential's *Convenience Store Keynote*, 58 percent of operators say that hot breakfast foods are driving their sales.

When operators think of ways to get traffic into their stores, all-day breakfast availability and ready-to-grab-and-go options are top of mind. Handheld breakfast options like quesadillas, burritos and tacos are the perfect innovation when thinking of grab-and-go as they can be easily customized for every diet type, from vegetarian-friendly to extra protein.

"Healthy enough" breakfast dishes, like avocado toast, have seen a spike the past few years. According to

Datassential's MenuTrends database, avocado toast has grown on breakfast menus by 691 percent the past four years, and it's not stopping there. National brand Dunkin' introduced avocado toast on its menu topped with cherrywood smoked bacon on sourdough toast — for just \$4. And who said millennials were spending too much money on avocado toast?

Blend It Up

C-store leaders have pushed the boundaries when it comes to what a convenience store can make in-house. C-store menu innovation tracked in Datassential's SCORES database shows that frozen and blended beverages stand out for both unique appeal and frequency, which drive repeat ordering.

Blended beverages have increased in presence at both c-stores and other quick-service operators. Blended beverages like smoothies and milkshakes are standout items that have become more interesting over time. For instance, nostalgic flavors like cotton candy, s'mores and birthday cake are indulgent and bring out the kid in anyone.

Cold brew, which has grown 795 percent on blended beverage menus, has made an appearance at quick-service operators like Jamba and Smoothie King, which offer smoothies with cold brew, fruit and protein powder as a morning or afternoon pick-me-up.

By the Slice

Fifty-one percent of consumers say they would be interested in customizing their own pizza at convenience stores; however, only 16 percent of operators offer the option.

Pizza is a ubiquitous platform that can be customized from the crust to sauce, cheese and toppings. Sauce, in particular, can change the whole flavor profile of pizza — as it has for other foodservice items. Operators have incorporated sauces such as Thousand Island Dressing to reimagine sandwiches like Reubens or McDonald's Big Mac.

C-store chain Casey's General Stores Inc. has introduced a variety of pizzas the past year from Chicken Quesadilla Pizza to Philly Cheesesteak Pizza, which has grown by 17 percent the past four years on permanent pizza menus. It's evident that Americans love pizza by the fact that 26 percent of consumers say they purchased pizza the last time they visited a c-store. Build-your-own pizzas are a great way to personalize each slice. **CSN**



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