

5 trends drawing young consumers to convenience retail operations

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A new report from **Y-Pulse, Chicago**, identifies five trends attracting Gen Z and younger Millennial consumers to convenience retail operations. Drawn from the perspectives of over 5,000 consumers surveyed in multiple consumer studies, expert opinions from culinary professionals and more than a dozen trade conferences across the globe, the report details the trending factors operators can use to captivate the attention of this sought-after demographic.

“These consumers may belong to a diverse generation, but the expanding range of offerings at convenience stores are able to satisfy their quest for food as unique as they are,” says Sharon Olson, executive director. “Operators will find that personal flourishes, from a familiar face at the deli counter to made-to-order everything, are trending among this savvy generation.”

Here are the five trends to watch for in convenience retail operations:

Having it all

When it comes to dining decisions, **young consumers are making choices without making sacrifices**. In fact, 76% of consumers ages 18-34 agree that they shouldn't have to try too hard to eat healthy, and 86% state that they expect healthy food to taste delicious too. Gen Z and younger Millennial consumers are a resourceful demographic willing to cast their net far and wide to find menu items that check off all their boxes, and they're willing to pay more too. For instance, 66% of consumers ages 18-34 say they don't mind paying extra for a snack if it's a healthy option.

Everyday lunch elevated

Unique, high-quality fare that can't be found anywhere else continues to attract young consumers. When asked to evaluate original menu concepts, **young consumers showed their love for items that offered an exciting upscale twist on lunchtime classics** such as pizza and grilled cheese. For instance, 74% of consumers ages 15-18 responded that they either “liked” or “loved” the Honey Sriracha Chicken Flatbread, a flatbread topped with mozzarella cheese, diced chicken, cherry tomatoes, fresh cilantro and a drizzle of honey Sriracha sauce, whereas 68% of kids ages 15-18 stated that they either “liked” or “loved” the Grilled Cheese and Roasted Vegetable Sandwich, a grilled cheese sandwich made with whole grain bread, stuffed with balsamic roasted vegetables and melted cheddar cheese.

And, 63% of consumers ages 18-34 stated that they like to try new items when purchasing food at convenience stores.

Customizable made for me

A little customization goes a long way with **young consumers, who enjoy foodservice venues that allow them to make their meal their own**. Case in point: 86% of consumers ages 18-34 state they would be likely to order menu items that they can customize, and 83% say they are willing to wait for a customized sandwich rather than buy a packaged one. Young consumers value their time, but when a menu item is customizable, this individualistic generation is willing to put their fast-paced lives on pause.

Protein power

Squeezing extra protein into their diets is a high priority for many of today's young consumers. Likewise, 66% of consumers ages 18-34 say that eating a high-protein diet is important to them, and 82% say that they love meat. Young consumers also value offerings that allow them to get a protein boost on the go. When presented with menu concepts for their evaluation, 66% of consumers ages 18-34 said they would be likely to try a high-protein snack box, featuring a serving of creamy cottage cheese, slices of smoked turkey jerky and unsalted toasted almonds.

Personally connected

Despite their love of technology, **young consumers recognize the benefits a human element adds to their dining experiences**. For example, 87% of consumers ages 18-34 state that staff who are knowledgeable about the food they are serving is important, while 50% of consumers ages 18-34 admit that they will go as far as skipping a purchase they were intending to make at the deli if the employees look bored.

But, young consumers understand that the value of staff goes beyond answering their questions and taking their orders. For instance, 71% of consumers ages 18-34 say they love visiting delis that are family owned and operated, and 65% of consumers ages 18-34 say they love their local deli because the employees are friendly.