

Five Youth-Driven Consumer Trends to Watch

CHICAGO — Retailers in every segment are striving to gain the favor of younger consumers. For convenience store operators, certain trends are attracting members of Generation Z and younger millennials, according to new research from **Y-Pulse**.

“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,” said Sharon Olson, executive director of Y-Pulse. “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.”

Based on the perspectives of more than 5,000 consumers surveyed in multiple consumer studies, expert opinions from culinary professionals and more than a dozen trade conferences across the world, **Y-Pulse identified the trending factors** that operators can use to captivate the attention of this demographic:

HAVING IT ALL

More than three-quarters of consumers ages 18-34 (76 percent) agree that they should not have to try too hard to eat healthy and 86 percent expect healthy food to taste delicious. Gen Z and younger millennials are resourceful, willing to search far and wide to find **menu items that check off all their boxes**, and they are willing to pay more, too. Two-thirds of younger consumers (66 percent) said they don't mind paying extra for a snack if it is a healthy option.

EVERYDAY LUNCH ELEVATED

When asked to evaluate original menu concepts, young consumers were most interested in items that offered an **exciting, upscale twist on lunchtime classics** such as pizza and grilled cheese. Seventy-four percent of consumers ages 15-18 stated 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; and 68 percent of those 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.

Young consumers regard c-stores as the perfect grounds for expanding their tastes, according to Y-Pulse. Sixty-three percent of those ages 18-34 stated that they like to try new items when purchasing food at c-stores.

CUSTOMIZABLE MADE FOR ME

Young consumers enjoy foodservice venues that allow them to **make the meal their own**, as 86 percent of consumers ages 18-34 say they would be likely to order menu items that they can customize and 83 percent say they are willing to wait for a customized sandwich instead of buying a packaged one.

PROTEIN POWER

Adding extra protein into their diets is a high priority for many young consumers. Two-thirds of those ages 18-34 (66 percent) said that eating a **high-protein diet is important**, and 82 percent said they love meat.

Young consumers also value offerings that enable them to get a **protein boost on the go**. When presented with menu concepts for their evaluation, 66 percent of respondents 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

Although they love technology, young consumers recognize the **benefits that a human element adds to their dining experience**. Eighty-seven percent of consumers ages 18-34 state that staff members who are knowledgeable about the food they are serving are important, and half of consumers in this age group say they will go as far as skipping a purchase they intended to make at the deli if the employees look bored.

Y-Pulse is a research and consulting practice that specializes in helping companies in the food business better understand tomorrow's tastemakers today. Founded in 2004, Y-Pulse is a division of Olson Communications Inc., headquartered in Chicago.