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Practical issues of layout, design and marketing

InStore

Part 1: Deli, dairy, meat

It is important to recognise that a consumer's vision of what constitutes a meal can vary immensely. It may be a sandwich and soup, a salad, a slice of pizza and a doughnut, yoghurt, a traditional three-course dinner or a jacket potato. The supermarket must be ready to use the resources of its fresh section to cater to all these meal opportunities.

Elsevier Food International, Vol. 11, Number 1, February 2008

Karen Willoughby

At trade events, representatives from top grocery retailers explain how they are repositioning themselves to become fresh food leaders in the marketplace. It seems as if the supermarket industry is just discovering that they sell meat, dairy, deli, and prepared foods. Well, that may be a bit unfair. In the past, most department operators for perishables were used to dealing with their products as commodity items. It has only been recently that they realised shoppers had changed their definition of fresh products from a commodity ingredient to components of a fine meal.

A delicate situation



One Jumbo supermarket in the Netherlands (design by Jos de Vries) has placed its cheese in an island in the middle of the store, just before the checkout.

The deli is the glamour section of the supermarket. Retailers often strive to make the design and décor of the deli stand out as a unique setting for the products for good reason. With competition for sales of dry grocery products and non-food items coming from mass merchandisers and c-stores, it is important that the fresh products are a significant point of differentiation for the supermarket.

While the design of many of these departments has ranged from subdued to over-the-top, many retail designers are now emphasising the product rather than those extra floor fixtures when developing supermarket fresh sections. There is an emphasis on letting the product steal the focus, according to Nadine McLearn, design director at US-based Design Fabrications Inc.

Lights!

In both the deli and meat sections of a store, lighting plays a big role. Colour is always an important factor in making food look appealing and appetising. The fluorescent bulbs normally used in supermarket display cases are designed to be strong in the green and yellow portions of the visible spectrum to give a bright light. However, under this lighting, roast beef can look dark brown, and any reddish tones are not visible. Truly balanced spectrum lamps, such as those made by Promolux, show fresh food displays to their best advantage.

Action!

Fresh foods have never been more popular, and the potential for sales of wholesome fresh products has never been greater. A visit to the supermarket deli used to be fairly straightforward. Options included sliced turkey, roast beef, salami, bologna and ham; nowadays, the choices are far more complex. For instance, basic turkey breast has evolved into oven-roasted, or smoked or

flavoured with honey or pepper. Turkey also may serve as an alternative to traditional meat bases, such as pork or beef, through the use of cures or flavourings that simulate the flavours of products such as ham, pastrami or bologna. Many store managers feel the deli is a focal point in planning for new as well as when remodelling stores, yet it is frequently the last department for which plans are finalised before construction commitments are made. In their defence, this is usually because they want to incorporate the latest available equipment and merchandising concepts.

As a leading department, the deli is often called upon to help create the store's atmosphere. There is a wonderful theatrical aspect to deli counters, making the role of the 'chef' important in conveying freshness and quality to shoppers. This can be done with minimum expense with a focus on a few select activities such as barbecuing chickens on a rotisserie, pizzas baking in an oven, or fresh sandwiches being prepared.

Beefing up

In the early 1950s, the meat department was king in the supermarket - the star of a retail industry heading toward its golden age. Four decades later, meat is still king. The meat department, in large supermarket chains or small grocery stores, is a challenging retail environment. Steve Wald, director of retail marketing for the US National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) observes: "Within the last couple years, with the advent of new products, space has become even more valuable. All of the new and different products - pork and chicken in addition to beef - in the fresh meat category are having an impact."



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