

# Serving up freshness

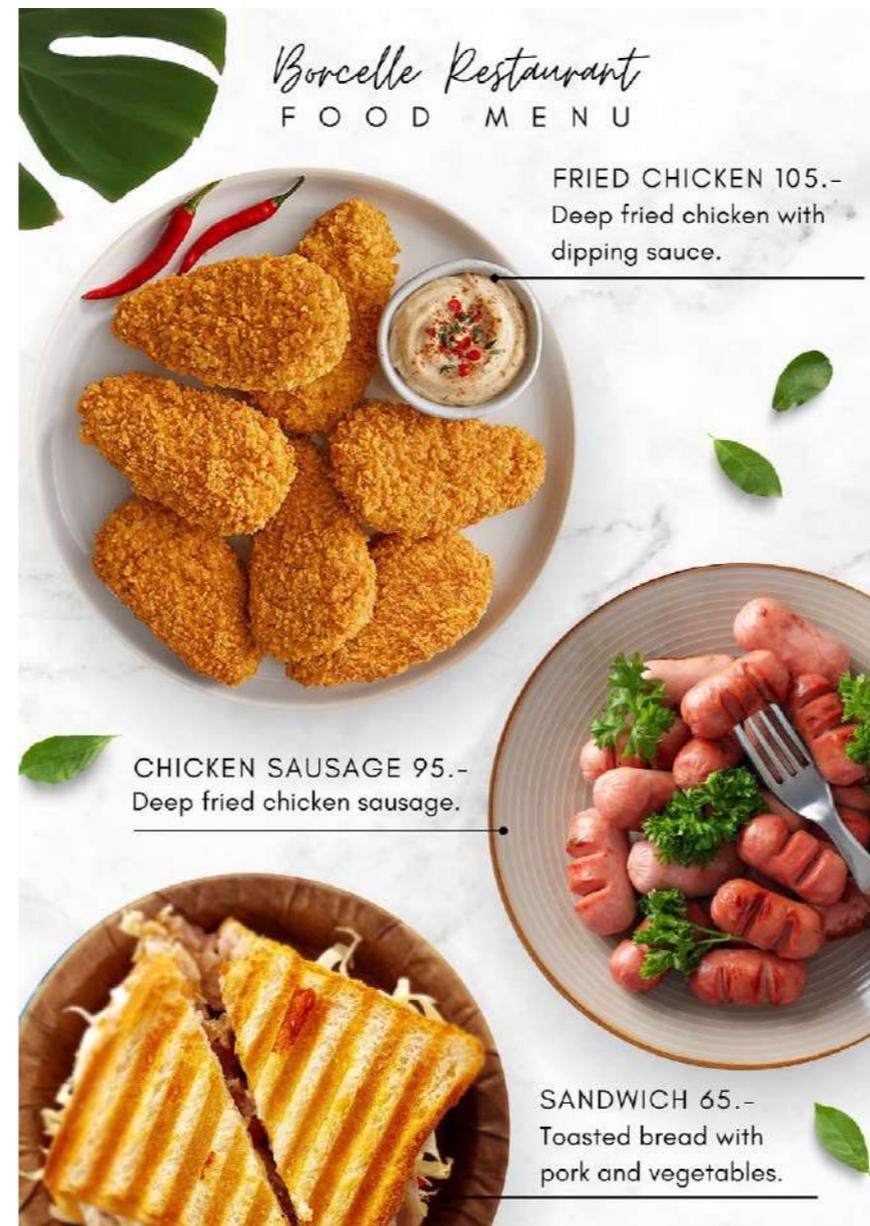
**New innovations, South African favourites, and global influences provide a blend of the new and the traditional in Food Service, HMR, and Deli**

It's no secret that today's consumer has an exceptionally soft spot for their local – or further afield – HMR and Deli counters. Whether shoppers are looking to save time, cater for a crowd, enjoy a welcome respite from meal preparation, have a 'treat' night, or just get someone else to do all the hard work, local food service, HMR, and deli options are their go-to.

But it's not only about ease and convenience. Nutrition, taste, and value for money are also key purchase decision drivers here.

For category managers and menu planners alike, thinking creatively is a must. As much as consumers crave the reliability and comfort of traditional favourites, they are also eager for tastes, textures, snacking and meal solutions that are fun, exciting, new, or different. South African shoppers are also keen to explore international flavours and menus.

Developing or stocking a range that includes traditional favourites and new-generation food that satisfies all your customer's needs – from at-home entertaining, Ready to Eat (RTE), Ready to Heat (RTH), and Ready to Cook (RTC) – is no small feat. But for consumers who are increasingly strapped for time, convenience is, as always, king. In addition, retailers must account for vegetarian,



Visual courtesy of Turkkub, www.canva.com/

plant-based, and better-for-you diets. HMR and deli can cater for a variety of dining experiences and for a variety of consumer needs.

## Retail food service: Embracing the plant-based revolution

Local restaurants are adding more plant-based options to their menus, and with good reason. More South Africans are becoming comfortable with plant-based options and meat-free alternatives, and they want their HMR, deli and fast-food offerings to reflect this.



Wikus Engelbrecht

ProVeg South Africa, a subsidiary of ProVeg International, a food awareness organisation working to transform the global food system, has been tracking the rise of plant-based diets across the country, and the data speaks for itself. Wikus Engelbrecht, ProVeg South Africa Communications Manager, says ...

“The South African market has a steady appetite for fast food. Challenges such as the Covid pandemic and the ongoing crisis of loadshedding have contributed to a considerable increase in fast-food consumption by South Africans, with a 33.1% rise since 2019.”

This local market growth reflects a global shift in consumer choices “towards more healthy,

Serves: 4  
Preparation time: 45 minutes  
Cooking time: 20 minutes



#### INGREDIENTS

##### Chicken:

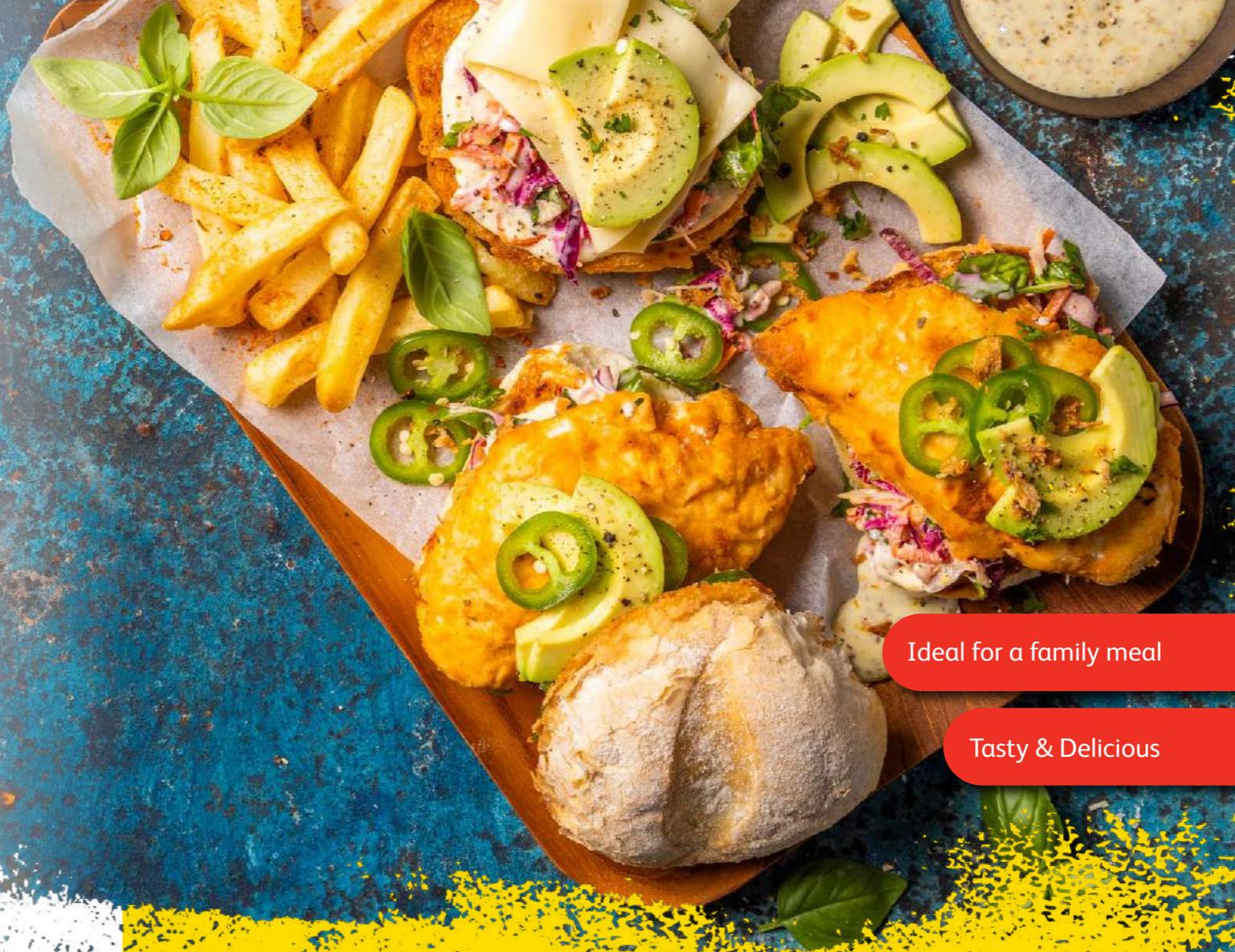
1 x pack County Fair Breast Fillets (4 breasts)  
1 ½ cup (375ml) buttermilk  
100g flour  
2 tsp (10ml) cayenne pepper  
2 tsp (10ml) garlic powder  
1 tsp (5ml) smoked paprika  
1 tsp (5ml) dried herbs  
Salt and ground black pepper  
Oil for frying

##### For the dressing:

150ml buttermilk  
15g basil  
15g parsley  
2 Tbsp (30ml) lemon juice  
2 Tbsp (30ml) honey  
2 Tbsp (30ml) mustard

##### Salad:

180g crunchy salad leaves  
1 avocado, sliced  
50g crispy onion  
4 burger buns, sliced in half  
1/3 cup (80ml) mayonnaise  
3 Tbsp (45ml) wholegrain mustard  
400g slaw mix  
4 square slices of cheese  
2 pickled jalapenos, thinly sliced



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# BUTTERMILK FRIED CHICKEN BURGER WITH MUSTARD

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##### Method:

For the chicken: Place the chicken breasts between 2 pieces of cling film and bat out with a rolling pin to an even thickness of about 2cm. Place into a bowl with the buttermilk and allow to chill for a minimum of 4 hours, but ideally overnight. In a bowl, mix the flour, cayenne pepper, garlic powder, smoked paprika and dried herbs with a big pinch of salt and pepper. Remove the chicken breasts from the buttermilk shaking off excess and dip into the flour mix, ensuring that each is evenly coated, and place them on a tray.

Fill a pan with cooking oil, about 3cm deep, and place over medium heat. Heat to 180°C.

Fry off the chicken in two batches, cooking on each side for about 5 minutes, until golden brown and cooked through. Remove from the oil and drain on kitchen towel. Prepare the salad: Place the buttermilk, basil, parsley, lemon juice and honey in a blender. Blend until smooth and stir through the wholegrain mustard. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Place the crunchy lettuce into a bowl and add the sliced avocado. Pour over the dressing and gently toss. Top with crispy onions. Slice the burger buns in half and set aside. Mix the mayonnaise and mustard and smear a generous dollop on each burger bun. Mix the remainder of the mayo and mustard through the slaw. Place the pickled jalapeno slices on the bottom halves of the buns, followed by the fried chicken. Top the hot chicken with a slice of cheese, followed by a generous spoonful of slaw. Place the bun lid on top. **Serve the burger alongside the fresh sala.**

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Serves: 4  
Preparation time: 20 minutes  
Cooking time: 30 minutes



#### INGREDIENTS

##### Chicken:

- ½ cup (125ml) mayonnaise
- 2 cloves garlic, finely minced
- ½ cup (125ml) sundried tomatoes in oil, drained
- 1 cup (250ml) grated mozzarella
- 1 x box County Fair Frozen Crumbed Chicken Burger
- 4 ciabatta buns
- 30g rocket
- 10g basil

## CRUMBED CHICKEN CAPRESE BURGER WITH MELTED MOZZARELLA

Two classics are combined in this recipe  
– a staple Italian salad and a well-loved burger.

##### Method:

Preheat the oven to 180°C.  
Mix the mayonnaise and garlic together and set aside.  
Finely chop the sundried tomatoes and set aside.  
Place 4 crumbed chicken burger patties on an oven tray and cook until golden, turning halfway. Remove from the oven.

Turn the grill on the highest setting. Spread the chopped sundried tomatoes over the top of each crumbed chicken burger patty, followed by a slice of mozzarella.

Place under the hot grill and cook until the cheese has melted and is golden. Remove from the oven. Slice the ciabatta buns in half. Spread the aioli over the cut sides. Top each base with a small handful of rocket leaves. Place a patty on each, followed by some fresh basil leaves. **Serve warm.**



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ethical and environmentally friendly lifestyles.” According to ProVeg, the vegan, vegetarian and flexitarian consumer embodies this shift, making up to 10-12% of the South African consumer base for 2023. Responding to this demand, national fast-food chains have quickly and innovatively adopted plant-based options, providing exciting new food choices.



ProVeg South Africa, a subsidiary of ProVeg International, has been tracking the rise of plant-based diets across the country, and the data shows a considerable increase, with a 33.1% rise since 2019. This local market growth reflects a global shift in consumer choices towards more healthy, ethical and environmentally friendly lifestyles.

Donovan Will, ProVeg South Africa director, says, “The report once again highlights significant opportunities available in the plant-based space within QSRs in South Africa, such as new products that still need to be developed, gaps on menus to be filled by existing products, and ways for outlets to attract more customers.”

One of the areas the report found to be lacking for QSRs, which could be extrapolated to include retailers, was the area of robust and prominent advertising campaigns for new additions to menus. ProVeg was quick to remind QSRs that they need to keep in mind that they are targeting flexitarians and omnivores who may be curious about trying plant-based options as well.

Engelbrecht adds, “It’s clear that the plant-based market is expected to grow over the next ten years, and that fast-food chains are recognising this shift.” It’s a shift that retail food services should keep in mind and make the most of the opportunities presented in this space.



Donovan Will

The new ProVeg report looked at the number of plant-based offerings at major Quick Service Restaurants (QSRs) as a central measure for performance.

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## Deli tastes and trends

**Grains.** Carl Cappelli, senior vice president of sales and business development for Don's Prepared Foods, in Schwenksville, USA, told DeliBusiness.com that, "The three hottest trends in deli-prepared foods for 2024 are value, convenience and unique items." He listed their grain salads as a good example of that uniqueness. "Launched in 2021, the line includes Mango Lime Quinoa, Island Grain with Bean Salad, and Roasted Corn Salad. Our new items are available in bulk, so delis can scoop out or pair with other deli items to offer customers meal solutions."

www.123rf.com/



**Hot and spicy.** Market trends show that things are heating up as consumers continue to up the ante when it comes to hot flavours and ingredients. Ghost peppers are

big news, but for those less

hardy souls, jalapenos, milder chillies, and spicier peppers are all gaining traction in winning over consumer tastebuds.

For local retailers, consider looking to the South African market for new chilli variants, exciting twists on Cape Malay and Durban-based curries, as well as to international inspiration from Asia and South

America. As with other FMCG categories, intriguing combinations of unexpected flavours are increasingly popular, as are fresh citrus flavours incorporated into traditional dishes to give them an interesting twist.

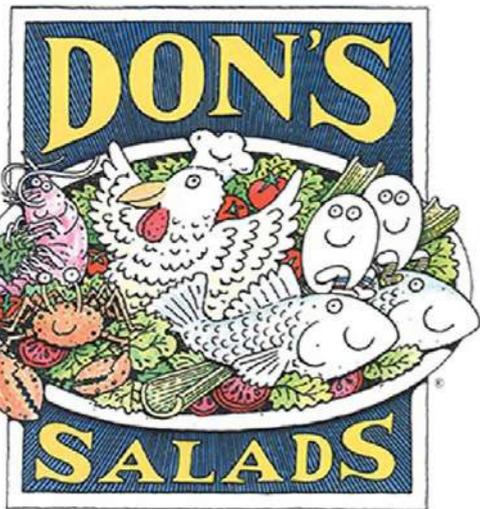
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**Social platforms.** Social media is the new playground across generations but particularly for younger consumers. Retailers should take note of the increasing number of shoppers who turn to platforms such as Pinterest, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube for their meal inspirations. Keeping a finger on the pulse of social media food trends is becoming more important than ever.

**Portion sizes.** Portion sizes are also changing across FMCG categories, but this is dependent on a store's shopper base. Blue-collar workers are more likely to want bigger portion sizes, while for other consumers, less is more, but only when it's a conscious decision. It's important to analyse your customers before making changes to portion sizes. Meanwhile bite-sized treats and smaller, more extravagant desserts have increased in popularity, as are single serving meals and more calorie-conscious portions. Higher income consumers are willing to pay more for quality, but they are still mindful of what they are consuming. Overconsumption is certainly starting to take a back seat for health-conscious consumers.

**Value for money.** Getting your money's worth is important for consumers internationally, and one that resonates with cash-strapped local consumers. Don't confuse value with cheap – consumers want good quality ingredients in tasty, filling, and nutritious food.



Don's salads ...

Top right: Island Grain with Bean  
Below left: Mango Lime Quinoa  
Below right: Roasted Corn.



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Shoppers want to feed themselves and their families well, without breaking the bank. Less expensive ingredients without compromising on taste and nutrition is what consumers are demanding in the current economy. Soups, stews, and plant-based protein meals are a good option here as we head towards the chillier months.

<https://proveg.com/>



**Wholegrains, whole grains, fruits, vegetables, seafood, beans, and nuts.** The Mediterranean Diet is gaining popularity globally. A more balanced approach to nutrition means consumers are leaning towards moderation and a more nuanced understanding of diet and 'healthy eating.' The Mediterranean Diet speaks to this, and meal plans, meal box subscription services, and social media are cottoning on fast. Retailers should take note of this for their own deli and HMR categories. Food items found in this healthy way of eating include extra virgin olive oil, walnuts, steel cut oatmeal, bean-based/plant-based pasta, lentils, sweet potato fries, cauliflower buns, blueberries, wild salmon, garlic, wild salmon, oregano, mushrooms, fennel, cauliflower crust pizza, plant-based burgers and quinoa.

<https://www.today.com/health/diet-fitness/mediterranean-diet-food>



### Into the future with Food Service

The National Retail Federation hosted the NRF24 – Retail's BiG Show expo in New York City in January this year. In a blog post after the event, 7 ways foodservice technologies are redefining tomorrow's retail experience, they shared just how the food service industry is changing – and why retailers should take note.

The post states, "In an era where technology and consumer expectations constantly evolve, retail companies are increasingly turning to advanced food service technologies ... From state-of-the-art cooking equipment to AI-driven customer service, these innovations are redefining the retail landscape and showing how retailers can incorporate food service into their retail operations." Some international food service trends include ...

Photography: Jason Dixon, [www.nrf.com](http://www.nrf.com)

- Advanced cooking equipment for improved efficiency includes ventless ovens and automated cooking robots.
- IoT-supported food service operations enable real-time monitoring and management of kitchen equipment, food safety, inventory, equipment maintenance, energy usage and waste.
- AI-based store intelligence includes temperature and food case monitoring, inventory management, and customer flow analysis.
- Catering to convenience, retailers are incorporating micro markets and fresh food vending machines into their spaces. These offer quick and healthy food options, catering to the rising demand for on-the-go eating.
- Tap-to-order technologies enable fast, convenient, self-service options, and can be used in 24/7 retail opportunities.



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### Deli-cious details

When it comes to the deli counter in supermarkets, looks matter. And we're not just talking about appetising offerings that appeal to the senses. How goods are displayed, from shelving and casing right through to lighting and signage, has a significant impact on purchase decisions. Food-friendly lighting is bright enough for customers to see what's on offer – pricing and labels included – without being too harsh or causing any discolouration of products. Often, cheaper lighting options are less expensive because they have an undertone that can detract from your display.

Keeping shelves and display cases clean, well-stocked, and attractive should be common sense, but unless you're stepping round to the customer-side of the counter, you might be missing out on some of these basic steps. Attractive display options do take up time and space and cost money, but they're a worthwhile investment, particularly if you're aiming to attract higher LSM shoppers.

### International deli and food service packaging innovation

Packaging that makes the customer's life easier is another trend that isn't going anywhere soon. Minimal time for food prep includes not having to decant RTC and RTH (ready to cook and ready to heat) products into alternative containers or find suitable lids or bases for microwaving or air frying. With overall market growth predicted for HMR and Deli categories globally, retailers must ensure they have the right equipment to do the job. As packaging and labelling evolves, alongside the rise of ready to eat (RTE), RTH, and RTC products, so too should your equipment.

ProAmpac, a US-based leading global packaging company with extensive knowledge of material science, has launched its latest sustainable technology in Europe – ProActive Recyclable FibreSculpt.



A high-barrier, fibre-based solution engineered for thermoforming applications suitable for various products, including chilled cooked meats, cold cuts, sliced cheese, and fish, this marks a significant step in packaging technology.

Ali McNulty, market manager for ProAmpac, says, "ProActive Recyclable FibreSculpt complies with OPRL (on-pack recycling label) guidelines and has over 90%

fibre content. It is also highly grease resistant for optimum shelf appearance with a remarkably high barrier to maintain product shelf life." She adds ...



Ali McNulty

FibreSculpt is lightweight and was engineered to maintain the thermoforming line speed, providing a higher yield per roll. It answers

consumer demand for more renewable packaging materials and is currently kerbside recyclable in the UK and Ireland, contributing to a more circular economy.



Adam West, ProAmpac's product development engineer in Europe, says, "Coupled with ProAmpac's high-barrier top web solutions with paper texture, ProActive Recyclable FibreSculpt provides customers with a more sustainable and premium flexible packaging platform."

Adam West

Olga Kriger, www.canva.com/





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AT OFFICE



AT WORK



AT PARTY



AT SCHOOL



WITH FAMILY



MADE IN





**Hints and tips:**

- Train your HMR and deli staff to view the display from the customer’s side of the counter. They need to take a walk around to the other side and stand in the customer’s shoes.
- How does it look from a customer’s perspective when they approach the deli counter and there are multiple staff standing in the service area. Does someone step up immediately to serve?
- Bad habits. Are your HMR servers chatting among themselves, paying no attention to who is standing waiting. Yes, it does still happen.
- Do your deli and HMR staff know what is on offer? Have they tasted the food and can they talk knowledgeably about it?
- Hygiene is of paramount importance. Are your deli and HMR staff always serving with gloves and keeping the serving containers clean?

**A package deal**

Sustainable, recyclable, functional and aesthetically pleasing – packaging has to meet multiple criteria. Global packaging trends are already slanted heavily towards these, in addition to innovative technology that supports food safety and improves shelf life and longevity.



**Signage: If you don’t tell them, your customers won’t know**

If you haven’t done so already, it could be time to update your deli, food service and HMR signage. Of course interior signage is usually updated as part of an overall store upgrade, so when the time comes, choose the best possible option in terms of look and feel, quality and visibility. Several local retailers have recently

undergone a facelift, revamped flagship stores, or made a splash with international openings. Across the board, signage has been relooked at and reimagined.

Not only does good signage clearly demarcate certain areas – such as deli, food service areas, and speciality counters – it advertises those departments, constantly reminding shoppers what your store offers.

An older visual that still has impact: Florence, Italy, 2015. A vendor sells cheese at Mercato Centrale market in Florence, Italy. The market, which opened in 1874, is an ultimate Italian shopping experience.

It also aids time-strapped consumers who may be trying out a new store, or looking for something they don’t usually purchase, locate what they want quickly and easily. When you pair this with exceptional service, knowledgeable staff, and a destination store that offers something

a little out of the ordinary, your store becomes a standout that attracts return customers and shopper loyalty. Customer satisfaction means they will return to your deli, order from your food service offering and incorporate your HMR menu into their everyday lives. **SR**



**Ann Baker-Keulemans** writes on topics related to business, lifestyle, technology, and health, with extensive knowledge on the SA retail and wholesale landscape. Contact [annbk@wilkinsross.co.za](mailto:annbk@wilkinsross.co.za) | [www.wilkinsrossglobal.com](http://www.wilkinsrossglobal.com)





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