

Storm in a bain-marie

HMR, Food Service & Deli continue to deliver

Products, solutions and trends in HMR, food service and the deli offer many opportunities to retailers and wholesalers, ranging from equipment that cooks and cleans itself, ingredients and pre-mixes that save time. Also the globalisation of the consumer driven by social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, X, Snapchat and Facebook – requires flexible, agile store managers who are social-media savvy and ready to roll with the trends and influences coming thick and fast from around the globe.

Convenience continues to drive consumers

HMR, food service and deli cater for a wide range of consumers, and the one thing they have in common is convenience. After all, it is the consumer's continued and growing need for convenience that drives these categories as shoppers look for nutritious delicious food that saves time and effort.

At the same time, time is money and customer loyalty is king when you're running a store, and HMR, food service and deli ingredients and products that offer consistent, reliable results are essential for return business.

Local brand Think Chef has a range of products for the food service sector that offer convenient,



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waste-free, predictable results, every time. Hendri Swart, Sales Manager at Think Chef, says, "Our products can be categorised into four main groups: savoury premixes, coatings, seasonings and dessert mixes. We offer standardised yields, simplicity, and cost-saving solutions. Each meal mix contains the same accurately weighed ingredients and fills

a standard half bain-marie insert, giving better quality control and consistency in flavour, colour and aroma. Our products are extremely versatile and taste delicious. They're also easy to use and recipe suggestions are provided." In short, they're convenient, and that's good for the store as well as the customer.



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While convenience is a key driver of HMR, food service and deli purchases, affordability is also an essential factor for many consumers. It's a global phenomenon. Belfast-based ready meal suppliers Go Pig explains, "If inflation continues apace, it will see consumers seeking more cost-effective meal options, as well as meals that can be prepared in energy-efficient methods, driving interest in prepared meal options."

According to Go Pig, "63% of consumers buy ready meals as an alternative to takeaways and 50% as an alternative to dining out. 57% of consumers would buy more if they were more readily available in convenience stores." Their meal offerings comprise nutritious, ready meals such as chargrilled chicken with noodles and infused soy dressing, shredded ham with mashed potato and a wholegrain mustard parsley sauce, and creamy prawn linguini with chilli and garlic.

Go Pig started as a small kitchen in 2016 and is now working from a 16 000 ft² facility in Northern Ireland supplying over 500 retailers including Spar and Eurospar stores across the country. The company has also noted a definite increase in consumer demand for healthier options.



On their Market Live programme, Babylonstoren invites their customers to join them on Thursdays at 13h00 for interactive shopping and special offers on farm favourites, with offers valid for one hour only.

<https://shop.babylonstoren.com/za>

Budget-friendly menus across the board

Grocery retailers and wholesalers understand that their offering needs to suit their consumers, and regardless of where you are based, those consumers often span socioeconomic classes.

“High-end deli and HMR offerings can achieve high profit margins, but affordable and nutritious meals for labourers, blue-collar workers, students, and more economically constrained shoppers can be a store's bread and butter.”

Often a reliable stream of revenue, these consumers tend to have little time to shop around and can be a loyal market with predictable habits.

Ensuring your deli and HMR services cater to their needs and preferences makes good business sense. Several food and flavours lend themselves to this endeavour, including, says Unilever Food Solutions familiar favourites such as beef mince curry, cheesy saucy meatball subs, chakalaka bean salad, pizza pap tart, samp and beans, tomato, onion and boerewors bredie, and sweet and spicy pasta salad.





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Trends that talk – what your HMR & deli managers need to know

As consumer needs and wants evolve, so buyer behaviour changes, and staying abreast of these changes is critical for your business success. There's no time to slowly adapt or gingerly test the waters – if shoppers can't find what they want when they want it, they will look elsewhere. Grocery retailers and wholesalers cannot risk their shoppers liking what they find somewhere else and switching loyalty. Sometimes this is a balancing act between adapting international trends for local shoppers, with enough homage paid to firm favourites and traditional comfort foods, while also embracing the fast pace of change, exploration, and experimentation that entices today's consumer.

Hi-tech kitchen helpers

Artificial intelligence (AI) and technological developments in commercial kitchens, food preparation and processing equipment are having an impact on all areas of food service, HMR and deli. From AI-inspired menus and recipes to multi-functional equipment that reduces time, reduces waste and saves on costs, technology is driving these categories to greater heights.

In Asia, according to fesmag.com, cobotics is the term used for human employees working food lines alongside robotic counterparts, proving that the two can work in harmony. For local retailers and wholesalers, a more practical investment would be in intelligent or combination equipment that saves time and labour costs, is energy efficient and takes up less space than its predecessors.



www.deliverykaspeed.com

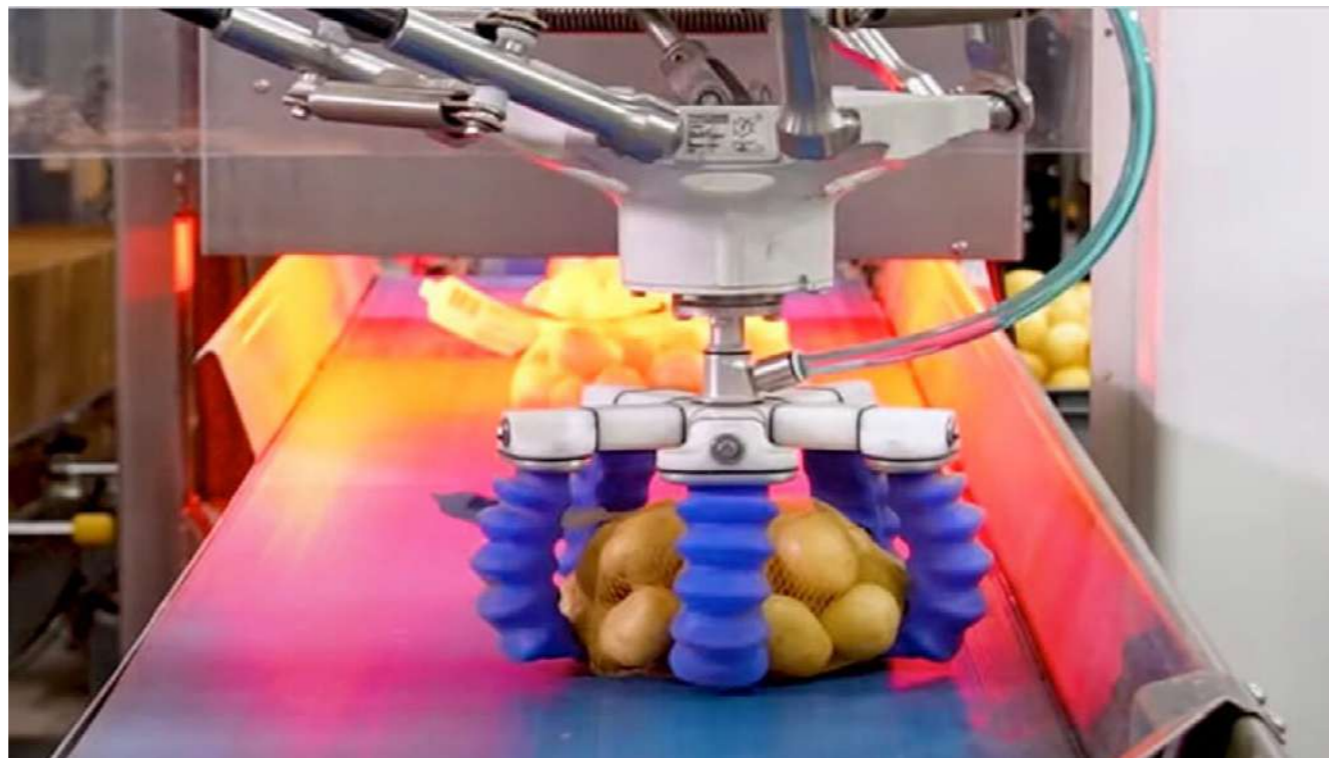
Food delivery apps

In an article published on Bizcommunity in November 2023: *Understanding the rise of food delivery services in South Africa*, Consumer Insights Agency KLA shared their results from a research survey on the food delivery industry (including groceries) using the YourView panel. "The food delivery industry in South Africa is experiencing unprecedented growth driven by the increasing prevalence and convenience of food delivery apps. Consumers are embracing the ease of having

meals and groceries delivered to their doorstep, leading to a surge in the popularity of food delivery services." Ultimately the report found that a variety of contributing factors was driving this growth, including convenience, the need for speedy delivery, a demand for variety and competitive pricing.

The report added, "The South African food delivery industry continues to evolve as consumers prioritise convenience, time-saving solutions, competitive pricing, variety and speedy delivery. Key players such as Checkers and Pick n Pay are actively responding to these trends, demonstrating a commitment to enhancing the customer experience and offering greater value.

By leveraging insights from consumer research, businesses can tailor their strategies to meet the evolving demands of South African consumers, ensuring sustained growth and success in this dynamic industry."



www.fanucamerica.com

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(Swiss-Rye 30%)

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Rye-Schwarzwälder Bauernbrot

(Black Forest
Rye 60%)

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Rye-Kommiss

(80%)

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Pure Rye

(100%)

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Ease of online ordering

In US-based food magazine, Food Business News, an article in December 2020 titled *The trends defining retail foodservice* predicted this growth: “A new report from Virginia-based FMI – The Food Industry Association, however, finds that despite the challenges it faces, retail food service is well-positioned to compete for more of the total food service pie going forward.” The report found that, “Seventy percent of shoppers say the ability to order the food in advance, whether via app, online or phone, would positively influence their decision to order from retail food service instead of restaurants or cooking.” The article adds, “The analysis suggests the ease of ordering could be more seamless, from separate apps or integrated apps with grocery ordering, for example, as well as in-store pick up, kerbside carryout and delivery options.” This is a trend that is now seeing excellent traction in the South African market, offering local retailers an opportunity to grow their foodservice offering.

Dining out at home

Adding to this, the Nourish Food Marketing 2025 Trend Report on www.producebluebook.com lists ‘Making eating at home a dine-out-level experience’ as one of its nine key trends, stating that, “As consumers look to recreate restaurant-quality experiences at home, they seek products that elevate home dining, whether through premium ingredients, semi-prepared meal kits, or elevated frozen options that bring special occasions to their table.”

<https://nourishd.co.za/>



Reap the rewards of a good reputation

Covid forced the adoption of new, higher standards in hygiene, sanitation and food safety. Building a reputation for cleanliness and ensuring your customers trust you and your offerings, are essential for good business. Part of this reputation building is better communication with customers by directly sharing your values, standards and product offerings. For example, Eat Out magazine in an article by Jess Spiro describes the creation of the perfect Woolies rotisserie chicken, from butter basting and

perfected cooking methods to using locally sourced chickens from farmers that adhere to sustainable, ethical farming practices. The packaging is also 100% recyclable.

On their website <https://www.woolworths.co.za> Woolworths states, “Our chickens eat grains and pulses {with} no animal by-products in their feed. It’s our obsession with quality that makes the difference.” Not just a rotisserie chicken, the messaging serves as a reminder of Woolworths’ broader business philosophy and builds trust and loyalty in its products, and in the company.

Social media

For HMR, food service and deli offerings, and for stores and manufacturers in general, social media and online communications, when used effectively, have incredible reach and a discernible impact on shopper behaviour. From online shopping channels to personalised, customised marketing, how

a brand or a business interacts with their consumers can make or break their reputation. An Instagram page that hasn’t been updated in more than a year, a website with broken links, or a brand with no website presence will not contribute to consumer trust or brand positioning.



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International inspiration

Newstalgia, or nostalgia with a twist, keeps gaining popularity as consumers continue to seek comfort as well as new experiences. According to an article on food trends for Foodservice and Hospitality, a Canadian magazine, Vince Sgabellone, food service industry analyst, points to French fries, burgers, breakfast sandwiches and chicken sandwiches, as the top menu items within this category.

Katie Belflower, associate editor at Technomic, told the magazine, "Some of the fastest-growing dishes over the last year are comfort foods, including indulgent options such as cheese-steak sandwiches (up 117.6%) and doughnut holes (up 105.9%)." Colin Burslem, culinary director of Canadian-based Joseph Richard Group (JRG), told the magazine that the company has begun adding to their grilled-cheese brand, offering items such as chicken parmesan grilled cheese and buffalo chicken grilled cheese.

Spicy flavours, Asian-inspired dishes and unexpected ingredients are driving interest from younger consumers and Think Chef's Swart says, "Our products are extremely versatile and can be used in various applications and dishes. We regularly post ideas on our social media platforms on how our products can be used in dishes from around the world." Spicy baked goods may sound hard to swallow, but for younger consumers, tasting the world and seeking bold new flavours and experiences, jalapeno-filled Danishes are a real treat.



<https://funky-ouma.co.za/>

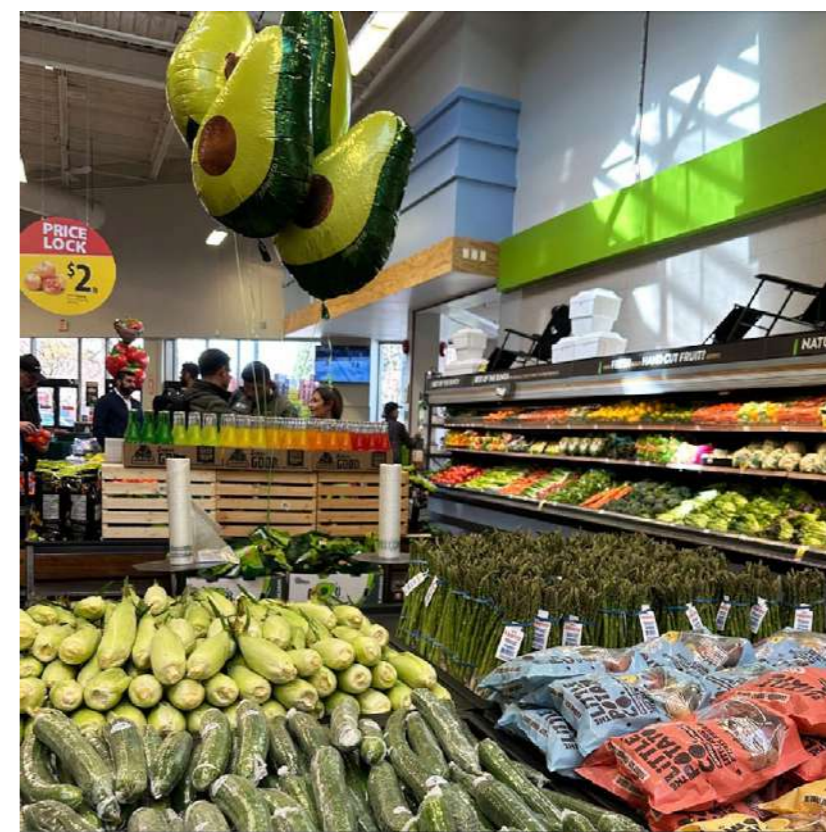
Health-conscious consumers are taking a closer look at their baskets

Snackification and the rise of little luxuries and mindful indulgence keep gaining traction. The health benefits of reducing calorific intake works together with the financial prudence of the 'smaller is better' trend. Foodservice and Hospitality says that according to the Nourish Food Marketing 2024 trend report, "Year-over-year growth in calories consumed could be coming to an end, pointing

to a combination of consumption consciousness, semaglutide (anti-obesity) medications and population decline as contributing factors."

The magazine adds that, "Nourish Food Marketing president and founder, Jo-Ann McArthur, also points the relevance of consumers' willingness to indulge in moderation, calling out the prevalence of indulging in small luxuries. 'The 'little treat' culture is already trending on TikTok,' she cites, calling out smaller portions – as well as healthier sides – as key ways food-service operations can adjust menus to meet this demand."

Nourish Food Marketing's 2025 trend report takes this further and highlights the rise and reinvention of the C-store channel. "Convenience stores are evolving from simple grab-and-go stops to mini-grocery destinations offering fresh, quality



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meal options. This trend reflects consumers' desire for convenience without sacrificing quality, and C-stores are responding with upgraded, healthier offerings."

This health-centric trend affects what shoppers consume as much as how they consume it. Niche diets, such as plant-based, dairy-free, low-carb, sugar-free and so on are no longer quite so niche and increasing numbers of consumers are looking for ways to improve their health while also reducing their environmental impact. "All Think Chef products have ingredient declarations and allergen statements to avoid any confusion. Our product benefits range from low in salt to lacto-vegetarian and vegan friendly," explains Swart.

In addition to this, manufacturers and suppliers are looking to plant-based alternatives as well as heritage and ancient grains as a way of branching out, offering good-for-you foods that have known health benefits and navigating the increasing costs of animal-based protein sources.

Consumers demand sustainability

From packaging to the final product, consumers are becoming more environmentally aware and the demand for sustainable, earth-friendly, low-impact, transparent solutions is growing. Think Chef is keenly aware of this. "Our meal mixes are packaged in food-safe buckets that are stackable and reusable. These buckets can be reused as storage containers, water containers for cleaning, or as planters, and they're also recyclable," explains Swart. "Our products also help reduce food waste

www.seebamboescpt.co.za/



through standardised yields – you always know exactly how much product you're going to get."

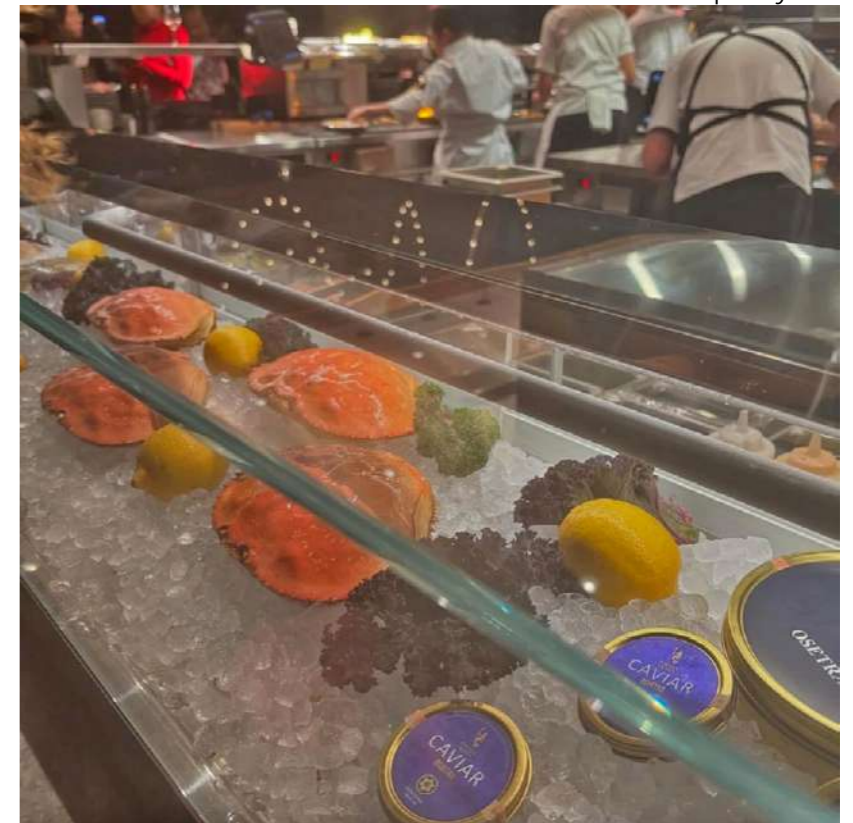
Feeling a little salty, might braai later

Internationally, the interest in speciality salts and flavoured butters has stepped up the seasoning game. Local brands such as Funky Ouma, Masterstock Cape Wild Food and Babylonstoren in Franschhoek have embraced this trend to great acclaim (and buyer delight). Adding these culinary delights to your deli and food-service options, with a South African twist of course, is an easy and cost-effective way to ramp up your flavour profiles, experiment with new tastes and ingredients, and tap into the popular social media trends of international players.

Go big and go home

Food service, HMR and deli are growing categories. Despite economic challenges and rising costs, consumers continue to seek these convenience options. For some, cost is key, while for others, added health benefits and quality drive their purchase decisions. Retailers and wholesalers must look to costs and production value without sacrificing taste, nutritional value, or their own reputation. It is a balancing act, but a worthwhile one to get right for these much-loved service departments. **SR**

www.foodserviceandhospitality.com



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 | www.wilkinsrossglobal.com



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