Mhlengi Thabethe
Staff writer
Supermarket & Retailer

Winning the snack aisle

Retail decisions that shape shopper choice

In a category driven by impulse, frequency and familiarity, retail execution is the true differentiator. From SKU rationalisation and price-point packs to occasion-based merchandising and packaging visibility, snack performance is increasingly defined by how products are ranged, promoted and presented on shelf.

Retail strategy, merchandising and growth levers in snacks & treats

While consumer demand defines the snacks category, retail execution ultimately determines success. In an increasingly competitive and price-sensitive environment, retailers are under pressure to balance margin, turnover and shopper experience – particularly in a category driven by impulse, familiarity and frequency.

Retailer behaviour and SKU strategy

Many retailers are actively rationalising ranges to streamline operations, reduce costs and manage shelf congestion. This has led to a stronger focus on high-turnover core SKUs, with slow-moving lines delisted more quickly. However, best practice suggests retaining a 10–15% innovation space to accommodate new flavours, limited editions and better-for-you alternatives. Speed-to-shelf trials – typically lasting eight to twelve weeks – allow retailers to test performance before committing to wider rollout or delisting decisions.

https://stockcake.com/i/shopping-for-snacks

> “Retail success in snacks depends on balance: protecting high-turnover core lines while intentionally creating space for innovation.”

Promotions, price points and value perception

Promotional activity remains a key driver of snack sales, particularly in crisps and confectionery. Retailers rely heavily on combo deals and price-point packs (R10, R15 and R20 SKUs) to maintain footfall and volume. Balancing deep promotions with value packs, everyday low pricing (EDLP) and clear value communication is essential to sustaining shopper trust and long-term profitability.

Shelf efficiency and occasion-based merchandising

Traditional shelf layouts, often organised by manufacturer or rigid category blocks, can limit cross-selling opportunities. Increasingly, retailers are moving towards occasion-based merchandising strategies, creating clearly defined zones such as ‘Lunchbox Staples’, ‘Entertainment & Platters’ and ‘Better-For-You’. Shelf callouts – including ‘New’, ‘Local Favourite’ and ‘Better For You’ – help simplify choice and drive discovery.

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> Retailers who sell by occasion – not just by category – unlock higher conversion, discovery and basket size.

Private label growth vs brand trust

Private label continues to grow as retailers seek margin expansion and differentiation. However, over-indexing private label in categories where brand trust is critical can undermine shopper confidence. A balanced strategy is recommended: private label for everyday value-driven snacking, and strong branded presence for indulgent and treat-led categories such as crisps and confectionery. Packaging quality and flavour credibility are essential if private label is to compete effectively.

Space allocation and discovery

Emerging categories such as healthier snacks and premium adult snacking are often under-allocated shelf space in favour of established high-volume lines. Dedicated end caps or curated sections for healthier snacks, gourmet crackers and premium chocolate can improve trial and justify premium pricing. Rotating these features monthly helps maintain shopper interest.

Checkout and impulse optimisation

While some retailers minimise checkout merchandising to improve queue flow, well-organised impulse zones remain powerful sales drivers. Compact, clearly merchandised checkout displays featuring small, high-margin items – chocolates, biscuits, crisps and gummies – can boost value without creating clutter.

Images courtesy of www.biscoplus.co.za

CASE STUDY

Baked snacks and everyday relevance

Baked snacks remain a cornerstone of South African pantries, combining affordability, familiarity and versatility. According to Adina Smith, Marketing Manager at Biscoplus (Henro range), accessibility underpins the brand's strategy. "Henro believes that good quality products must be accessible, affordable and enjoyable for everyone," she says. "Our focus is on creating products that fit naturally into everyday moments; whether that's an on-the-go snack, a family gathering or sharing with friends."

Smith notes that Henro's expanding portfolio reflects both trusted favourites and evolving tastes. "We've worked tirelessly to grow our range across different categories to give consumers quality snacks and pantry staples they know and trust," she explains. The range includes Choc Chip cookies, Lemon Creams, Marie biscuits, My Scotties shortbread and Ginger biscuits, alongside newer innovations such as wafers and the Henro Crispy Crave savoury crackers. Expansion into spreads, including peanut butter and honey, has further strengthened shelf presence.

From a retail performance perspective, Smith highlights the importance of fundamentals.

> Availability and clear shelf visibility are key drivers of strong biscuit sales.
>
> **Adina Smith, Marketing Manager Biscoplus (Henro range)**

"Pricing must be easy to understand, and off-shelf displays play a major role in increasing accessibility and driving incremental sales."

While Lemon Creams and Marie biscuits remain core volume drivers, the Choc Chip range and Crispy Crave crackers are gaining momentum, underscoring the importance of balancing trusted staples with well-executed innovation.

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> Price-point packs and promotions drive footfall, but long-term value is built through clarity, consistency and trust.

Packaging and merchandising: What matters most

Packaging plays a decisive role in a category driven by impulse. Bold colours, strong flavour cues and clear branding support faster decision-making, while pack architecture – including single-serve, multipacks and share formats – allows retailers to cater to multiple shopping missions.

Sustainability expectations are rising, particularly among younger consumers. Recyclable materials and paper-based packaging offer differentiation without compromising shelf appeal. Design elements that signal freshness and quality, such as resealable features and moisture barriers, are especially important in confectionery, where quality deterioration quickly erodes trust.

Prime placement remains critical. Till points, queue lanes, gondola ends and seasonal displays consistently outperform standard aisles. Retailers that treat snacks and treats as a margin-driving category rather than a commodity benefit from increased conversion and basket size.

https://stockcake.com/i/grocery-aisle-view

https://stockcake.com/i/toddler-chooses-snack

Looking ahead

As South Africa's snack market evolves, retailer success will depend on balance: protecting high-performing core ranges while creating space for innovation and discovery. Selling by occasion, optimising impulse touchpoints and collaborating with suppliers on data-driven trials will be key to driving footfall, consistency and margin. In a market where small bites continue to deliver big business, retailers that anticipate shopper needs – rather than merely reacting to them – will define the future of snacks and treats in South Africa. **SR**

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