



Grocery Innovations Trade Show Trend Highlights

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Toronto Grocery Innovations Trade Show

The Grocery Innovations Canada Trade Show took place October 26 and 27, 2008 at the Toronto Congress Centre and showcased new and existing food and beverage products that are available in retail grocery stores. The show bills itself as the largest retail-focused industry event in Canada. There were over 260 companies exhibiting at the event which hosted over 6,000 industry professionals. The show which was presented by the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers was well attended by national brands and multinationals.

CTV video of the Grocery Innovations Show:

<http://watch.ctv.ca/news/top-picks/grocery-innovations/#clip105330>

The Canadian retail grocery industry is worth over \$76 billion and operates in a fast paced and challenging environment. Today's consumers are more nutritionally aware and are interested in products with added value that are better for them and their families. As such, this year's show featured various product line-ups that focused on health and wellness, the environment and innovative product packaging.

Kid-Focused Organic Foods

The presence of organic products at recent food shows continues to grow and Grocery Innovations was no exception. It must surely be seen that this is no longer a trend in the true sense. Organic seems to have taken on a similar role as "light" or "diet" in the support of a key brand's main or core product line. While organic foods were highly visible throughout the show what stood out at this event was kid-focused organic food lines such as Nature's Path new EnviroKidz cereal, and Kiju organic juices. A number of companies were promoting kid specific organic food products and product lines.

Reintroducing Foods as "Authentic"

Traditional, recognizable branded products with a long history on Canadian shelves seem to be promoting the authenticity of their products with increasing vigor, for instance, suggesting traditional or typical products were "authentic" Italian products. Unico suggested consumers "bring real taste home", where Primo suggested their products were enjoyed "for the love of Italian food". Robin Hood put its own spin on this theme and had a line of products that stated they were "just like homemade". This messaging is not new, but it did seem more prominent given an industry-wide push towards more authentic ethnic meals, or the idea that bringing the restaurant meal experience home was possible. Whether this is a response to the ever increasing presence of high quality imported foodstuff is unclear, but it was clear that these products, regardless of where they were produced were keen to promote their authenticity.

Product Attributes over Product

With increasing interest from consumers in the relationship between diet and health, it was evident that health and wellness was a trend at the show with numerous products carrying reduced salt and sugar advertising. Reduced salt and sugar in semi-processed products seems to be picking up momentum as there was a noticeable emergence of cook-at-home food ingredients such as canned fruit or vegetables that were prominently advertised as containing "no added salt" or "no sugar added". Combine this with the large number of products advertising reduced salt/sodium and it seems that a return to the "seasoned to taste" idea for some processed foods is underway.

One product in particular stood out solely based on its packaging - a frozen vegetable mix offering from Green Giant called "Essentials". This product advertised one of four single health benefits depending on the mix. This product was notable because the advertised health benefits were much more prominent on the packaging than has probably been seen before. The actual vegetables in the mix almost seemed secondary to the health benefits being promoted. The products themselves stated that the product line "purposefully combined specific vegetables to provide natural, consumer-relevant health benefits." The new product launch highlighted four varieties/items with either high antioxidant properties, two varieties that were high in fiber and one that was a source of omega-3. To pass by, no single product stood out more and it was based entirely on the prominence of the nutritional advertising. It is obvious that these vegetable blends always had key nutritional benefits, but with the addition of one or two varieties to a blend, a company has given themselves the opportunity to stress very specific attributes. Based on their show advertising, General Mills has researched some fairly specific consumer demands and created vegetable mixes to produce health benefits that are both topical and relevant to consumers today.

Packaging – Transparent, Tetra, Environmentally Friendly & the New Spin on Bulk

Aside from product-related trends, the most interesting trend of the show was developments in retail packaging.

Clear packaging

The emergence of clear packaging and its tie-in with premium and quality was noticeable across the show, where fruits, vegetables and prepared foods like soups were all moved out of more traditional tins and placed in clear jars (plastic or glass). This made the product clearly visible, and the intention was obvious as even the product labels were transparent. The visible quality of the product itself, not a professional photograph, was on display for consumers. One product that caught the interest of a number of buyers was a clear can (plastic) for soft drinks. It had the same dimensions of a typical aluminum can and the same lid, but was made from a clear plastic. That product packaging definitely attracted buyer attention.

Tetra or Similar packaging

The continued emergence of Tetra packs to hold an expanding line of products was notable this year, due to a number of demonstrations highlighting the extended shelf life and stability of perishable products, such as, milk. A non-refrigerated milk tetra was being advertised with a suggestion that a consumer "never needs to run out of milk again". It was interesting to see that a product like milk would be marketed as something consumers could keep tucked away in their cupboard until they need it.

Environmentally Friendly Packaging - Reduced packaging

The emergence of concentrates and other water-reducing practices to limit plastic use continued to be on display, but an interesting innovation was a further reduction for "squeeze" products like ketchup, jam or various other sauces. One exhibitor demonstrated a package where products were taken out of glass or traditional plastic bottles and moved to a thick and stackable plastic bag. Exhibitors highlighted the continued usability of the product as a squeeze bottle from a consumer's perspective as well as the significant reduction in plastic being used.

Environmentally Friendly Packaging - Compostable packaging

While packaging reductions continue to be the story, the introduction of “compostable” into the packaging lexicon was a definite surprise from this event. A number of products demonstrated packaging that they defined as compostable after use. With municipalities all over the country introducing “clear” or “compost” recycling programs, these products are very well placed.

Environmentally Friendly Packaging - Biodegradable Plastic

Another new product at this year’s event was Natrel’s Organic milk now being offered in biodegradable plastic outer bags in the 4L size. These “OXO-Biodegradable” bags will biodegrade to carbon dioxide, water and organic matter in roughly three years when exposed to air or sunlight. These bags were available in grocery stores starting November 3, 2008 and their launch has been supported by a strong advertising campaign. The confidence of a company combining organic milk in bulk sizes with biodegradable packaging speaks to the sustainability of organic foods on Canadian retail shelves. There are plans to introduce similar biodegradable packaging for the individual bags containing the milk itself in the very near future. The product is awaiting government approval, but it should be noted the product is currently available in Europe, not a guarantee of approval, but certainly a positive sign.

Environmentally Friendly Packaging - Bulk Being Marketed as Green

A very interesting turn for in-store products and packaging was an effort to market bulk food products as a green packaging initiative. This trend was put forth by Brenca, a company that sells bulk food bins under the trademarked slogan “The Ultimate Green Packaging”. Bulk may already benefit from the perception of being a “fresh” product as consumers may equate self packaging with freshness, but again here fresh food is being further bolstered by a positive environmental impact.

Conclusion

- The link between green and organic has increased as packaging and products strive to meet the needs of a more environmentally involved consumer and it is obvious that the strategy includes a “start them while they are young” philosophy.
- Healthy attributes are no longer exiled to the nutritional fact box and quality products are letting the actual product sell itself as opposed to an artist’s interpretation of the product.
- Well recognized products and brands continue to advertise long standing attributes in a new way based on well-researched consumer demands. This includes stressing that despite a long presence on store shelves a food product is authentic from an ethnic food perspective.

In all, the story of grocery innovations from an agri-food perspective was quality food with a decreasing impact on the environment.