



What Will Be Our “New Normal” Post Pandemic?

We have all experienced a myriad of changes in the past pandemic filled few weeks, as a lockdown lifestyle becomes our new reality.

Inevitably, there is a lot of debate as to whether any of these changes will endure beyond the end of the current restrictions. What will stay with us and what will fade into being just a memory?

This article looks at how the current events are affecting the food and drink sector and suggests some of the questions that companies in the sector should be asking themselves, in order to adapt to the likely “new normal” in the future.

The world is changing daily – is your business keeping a regular eye on what the new market insight data might mean for you?



Trends – What’s Hitting the Accelerator or the Brake Pedals?



Reviewing the food and drink sector in the UK, and other markets in Europe, the USA and Australia, [The Food People](#) have identified that some of the consumer behaviours we are seeing right now are more exaggerated forms of trends that were already in motion pre-pandemic.

For example, concern about food waste was already on the rise and the desire to eat seasonal, locally produced foods was increasing.

Equally, shopping online for food and drink deliveries in the UK had reached 7% of purchases in the sector, but the Mintel Online Supermarket data showed this leapt to 9% in the 4 weeks from 20th March to 20th April 2020.

Having been “supercharged” by the crisis, these trends may be the ones that gain more traction in the long term.

Other trends had been on the wane pre-pandemic.

As the recessionary effects of the decade from 2008 had begun to fade, with austerity measures slackened and unprecedented high levels of employment here in the UK, consumers had been trading up into premium products, willing to treat themselves and looking for indulgent options.

Now this trend, which had allowed food and drink producers to innovate successfully in the premium area, may diminish.

The [IGD \(Institute of Grocery Distribution\) ShopperVista Survey](#) conducted between 12 to 18 April 2020 revealed that 50% of shoppers expect to be financially worst off in the year ahead. So, the tendency for consumers who are managing on tight budgets to seek strong value for money might return with a vengeance.



How do your ranges address consumer’s concerns not to be wasting any food that they buy ?

This might be through optimising pack sizes to the way consumers use your products, providing packaging which helps with portion control or storage; increasing shelf life both before and after the pack is opened or just proving the consumer with the part of the product they will use – and your business diverting the waste into other product opportunities.

What does this new budget conscious trend mean for your business?

New Shopping Behaviours and what this means for Food and Drink businesses



The Lockdown has triggered new shopping behaviours and it will be interesting to see which of these are maintained in the medium to long term.

It is now socially responsible to “just buy what you need, not what you want”. Although consumers are “treating themselves” in some ways to cheer themselves up during the lockdown, it isn’t considered something to broadcast.

People are seeking to reduce their exposure to the virus by making less shopping trips, and with this comes more planning of the weekly meals – helped by living lockdown giving them more time on their hands to do this.

And when they do get to a shop, the one-way systems and social distancing rules mean it is hard to linger and browse a fixture. So impulse purchasing is less prevalent, with shoppers just picking what they need as quickly as possible.

Equally, research has shown that shoppers purchasing groceries online are less likely to impulse shop. So again, it is important that consumers have your products front of mind when placing their food and drink order.

With many families facing financial hardships now, and uncertainties over employment in the future, businesses will need to proactively review their approach and adapt to survive the economic effects of the pandemic.

There is virtually unanimous agreement from commentators on the food and drink sector in the UK and Europe, that going forward consumers will be very budget conscious, moving out of premium and non-essential sectors and seeking bargains and value for money.

It will be critical for marketing by Food and Drink brands to reach their target consumers even more effectively than ever, in order to ensure that shoppers believe in the merits of the product enough to put it firmly on their shopping list.



Do you believe that these new ways of thinking about food and drink shopping will carry on and affect future shopping patterns?

*If so, how well do you understand what is **now** important to your existing – and potential - consumers?*

How can you reach them most effectively to convince them that your products are worth putting on their shopping list and seeking out – either instore or online?

Benefitting from Food and Drink Trends

These “accelerated trends” will present opportunities for innovation in some product categories more than others.

Health is very much at the front of people’s minds in the current climate, so targeting innovation in healthy products into sectors which are experiencing a resurgence may deliver increased sales.

How can your business create products which address the needs of several of these trends at once ?

Let’s look at some of the most recent trends in more depth.

Cupboard Love



Creating meals from the kitchen cupboard has moved beyond beans on toast!

Consumers are appreciating that long life canned and bottled foods have many benefits.

Having a range of these foods in the cupboard brings flexibility to put together a meal as and when needed, reducing food waste.

If you have a favourite ingredient, once canned or bottled you can enjoy it all year round.

Consumers are cooking with an ever-widening variety of dried herbs and spices, for example, a wide range of named Chilli varieties now cater for consumer’s love of hot and spicy foods.

Pickled and fermented foods have been a major trend in the past couple of years, with many new products coming to market.

Innovation in the sector has brought a myriad of new world-wide ingredients to shoppers who are willing to experiment with new recipes and flavours.

From dill pickles to miso paste, vegan jackfruit to gluten free pasta and Katsu curry paste to all those oily fish – mackerel, sardines and salmon - that we are told by nutrition experts to regularly eat each week.

Ambient, kitchen cupboard friendly products present opportunities for food and drink companies to innovate with healthy, nutritious foods to inspire consumers to experiment with home cooked meals.



How could your business inspire consumers in this re-energised “kitchen cupboard” category?

Can you combine great flavour with strong nutritional credentials in an affordable format that minimises food waste?

How can you help customers feel confident to experiment and create new meals?

Is your innovation providing convenient, easy to use formats which represent great value for money?

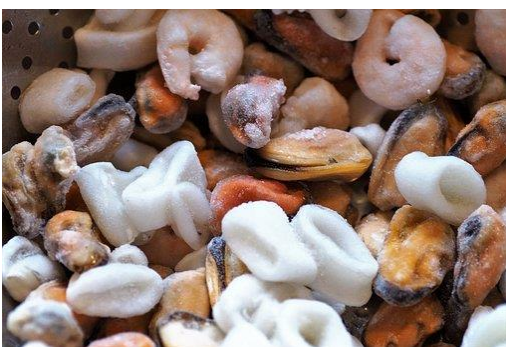
Freezer Friend

Similarly, the frozen food sector has had something of a makeover.

Previously a down-market option and the realm of cheap, dubious quality foods; now the benefits of freezing food are becoming clear to consumers.

As they appreciate how products can be frozen at the peak of freshness and nutritional value, without the need for artificial preservatives, so comes a realisation that fresh isn't always best.

Many frozen foods are packaged so that the home cook can just take out as much as they need, bringing great portion control, whilst reducing food waste and representing good value for money.



With consumers trading down, there may be opportunities to offer otherwise unaffordable products at accessible prices because frozen products can be packed at the peak of harvest or availability, when costs are lower.

Premium options – such as seafood or unusual fruit and vegetables, globally inspired recipes which reflect trends such as South east Asian and Latin American cuisines – might be especially attractive when offered in the frozen cabinet.

Lifestyle choices such as the trend for plant-based products, the desire for free-from options, affordable treats and convenient snacking could all be catered for in both these sectors.

Could the freezer cabinet be a viable option for your products and how might this fit with your brand values ?

What adaptations would you need in your production and supply chain?

Can you benefit from improved raw material costs by buying when they are plentiful, and prices are lower?

If labour shortages prevent fruit and vegetable crops being harvested, what will this mean for your business and do you have a contingency plan?

Are your products packed in a way that consumers looking for hygienic handling of food and drink because of the virus risk will find appealing.

For retail lines, do you have SRP (Shelf Ready Packaging) that would reduce the need for store staff to handle the product – and improve the impact of your products on shelf?

Lunch Time

Thinking back to the last recession, many more people took packed lunches to work to save money.

However, research at the time revealed that they found preparing lunch boxes these each evening – and finding something different to take each day - something of a chore.

So, once normal working returns, could your company innovate with tasty, convenient yet price conscious lunch box options?



Direct to Consumer

If nothing else, this pandemic has shone a light of the food and drink industry.

Workers in the sector have been recognised as “key workers” and their role underpinning how we eat every day has been highlighted.

Our reliance on imports, long complex supply chains and overseas agricultural workers comes to no surprise to us in the industry but is news to the general consumer.

Supermarkets having reacted to increase home delivery capacity and the UK and devolved governments having shared information about those vulnerable persons who are “shielding” at home. However still at the end of April consumer protection organisation [Which](#) have identified that people are still finding securing food suppliers difficult.

Many consumers have realised, for the first time, that they have local suppliers who can offer them great products right on their doorsteps.

Sometimes this has meant literally delivering to the doorstep!

Local businesses across the UK have innovated to supply via deliveries or collection services to keep their companies afloat, staff employed and serve their community.



A survey of fruit and vegetable growers in Wales, conducted by Peas Please, Tyfu Cymru and Cardiff University in April 2020, highlighted that producers across Wales responded quickly to find alternative sales routes, with many diverting from catering trade to home deliveries.

Many Welsh growers and suppliers have adapted their selling channels to accommodate the demand from consumers who are self-isolating or do not wish to risk contracting the virus by visiting supermarkets.

They have quickly adapted to launch veg box schemes, deliveries collaborating with other Welsh food producers, moving online or setting up call and collect services.

Many smaller, local suppliers across the UK hope that consumers will like what they have found and want to continue to buy seasonal products from them once the immediate crisis has passed.

Consumer insight research agency [Vypr](#) have established, through their Covid-19 Consumer Impact Tracker for April 2020, that two thirds of their panel (selected to be representative of UK consumers) are keen to support local food and drink businesses. Furthermore 10.3% stated that they intend to continue ordering from local suppliers once the current lockdown situation is over.



Demand patterns continue to be erratic, with the exit strategy from our current position as yet unclear.

Even when our “new normal” in the medium term is better understood, consumers are likely to need their reduced finances to stretch further.

So, it may be a good longer-term investment for food and drink suppliers to turn what was born of necessity to good advantage and establish robust and easy to use ways for consumers to order and receive deliveries.

How can your business highlight the benefits for consumers of buying from you as a local or specialist supplier?

Can shoppers find you easily online?

Are your ordering and payment methods secure, safe and convenient to use?

How would you need to adapt your business model and ways of working to ensure that direct to consumer deliveries are prompt, achievable and financially profitable in the longer term?

Might it worth you collaborating with other local businesses to effectively provide a wider offer of related products and what management systems would this require?

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