

SWEETS & SNACKS EXPO RELEASES TOP TRENDS FOR 2021

The Sweets & Snacks Expo released the top trends for the 2021 confectionery and snack categories.

Here are some of the trends from this year's Sweets & Snacks Expo:

Smaller pack sizes: More companies continue to develop smaller pack sizes containing 200 calories or less. This trend empowers the consumer to make informed choices when they are ready to treat themselves to their favourite snack or candy.

Tropical flavours: So many consumers are dreaming of a day at the beach and enjoying all that summer has to offer. This year, tropical flavours are taking centre stage with a focus on pineapple and coconut. Sit back, relax, and enjoy a tropical treat... cue the sound of ocean waves!

Mix and match: Can't decide which flavour to enjoy? Candy and snack manufacturers are bringing consumers the best of both worlds. Whether they are looking for sweet, salty, fruity, or tart, shoppers can't go wrong when mixing up their favourite combinations.

Spice it up: Think you can handle the heat? At the Sweets & Snacks Expo, the hottest (and we mean hottest!) new spicy snacks featuring flavours like chili, sriracha, jalapeño and habanero will be on full display.



Vumami Foods Marks First Year in Business and 100th Retail Location



Vumami Foods is celebrating two major business milestones: its first anniversary and its 100th retail location. The Sidney, BC-based company produces Umami Bomb, its signature product available in four varieties: Medium, Hot, Garlic and Extra Hot. The vegan shiitake mushroom-based chili oil adds bold, savoury, spicy flavour to any dish making it instantly craveable and delicious.

The fast-growing company, Vumami Foods, was launched only a year ago and has already become a staple in the kitchens of home cooks throughout Canada. "Vumami Foods was launched during the COVID-19 pandemic and that certainly came with unique challenges," said Vumami Foods Founder Nicholas Baingo.

"As a new company with such a unique product, we were very fortunate that our retailers love Umami Bomb as much as we do and took a chance on us."

For more information: www.vumamifoods.com.

Save-On-Foods Tops B.C.'S Most Loved Brands List for Second Straight Year

Save-On-Foods has topped the list of 70 B.C.-based businesses for the second straight year and is officially B.C.'s Most Loved Brand for 2021.

In its annual brand love survey, BC Business Magazine and research firm Ipsos team up to survey more than 1,420 British Columbians about businesses based in B.C. on 47 different attributes. The 2021 survey also included new questions about businesses' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.



"It's such an honour to be named B.C.'s Most Loved Brand for 2021 by our customers," said Save-On-Foods President Darrell Jones. "This company has a long history of going the extra mile for its customers and communities, and we have had more opportunities than ever to do that in the last year. I am so proud of the Save-On-Foods team and I can't thank them enough for their outstanding commitment to the people who are counting on them. Congratulations to all the other excellent companies on the list of B.C.'s Most Loved Brands."

Cascades Launches its Fourth Sustainability Action Plan "Driving Positive Change"

Cascades, the 17th most sustainable company in the world according to Global 100, has launched its fourth Sustainability Action Plan, the most ambitious in its history: "Driving Positive Change".

"Sustainable development is part of our DNA. Nearly 60 years ago, long before environmental principles and social impacts were taken into account in business practices, our company became a pioneer in the circular economy by making products from recycled materials. This new sustainability plan, in addition to being aligned with the priorities of our clients and partners, reaffirms our leadership amidst the growing challenges facing our society and our planet," said Mario Plourde, president and chief executive officer of Cascades.

The plan, which includes 15 defined targets for 2025 and 2030, is based on four main pillars: Respectful of the Planet, Solutions Driven, Community Minded, and People Focused. It is also aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations and with the recommendations of the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) in terms of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.



FIELD AGENT SURVEYS DIGITAL CONSUMER

As the country emerges from the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, every industry is facing questions. Questions like: what is the new normal – and what does the future hold?

Nowhere are these questions more relevant than in digital grocery. The IBM Retail Index reports that the shift from brick-and-mortar retail to digital shopping increased by as much as five years over the course of the pandemic – a monumental change.

Digital grocery is increasingly a fixture in shoppers' lives, from home delivery to in-store pickup, to ordering through smart speakers. How are shoppers using these services, and what opportunities and challenges face digital grocery in 2021?



Jeff Doucette



To answer these questions and more, Field Agent surveyed 1,000 shoppers who provided insight into the role that digital grocery plays in their lives, and answered questions including:

- What are shoppers' major concerns with online grocery?
- Which online grocery retailers and third-party services are rising to the top?
- What are the permanent effects of the pandemic on shopper habits?
- What will online grocery look like five years from now?

"There is no doubt that the adoption of online grocery has been expedited by the pandemic and retailers have stepped up with new offerings as well. We have traditionally lagged well behind the US in this space, but we are closing the gap quickly," stated Jeff Doucette, general manager of Field Agent Canada. "While it may not be the drones and automated robots delivering items to our door, the future does look very bright for online grocery."

SYNQ Deploys BISPUN (Buy In-Store Pickup Now) USING CUSTOMER DEVICES ALLEVIATING IN-STORE HARDWARE NEEDS

SYNQ TECHNOLOGY, a leading provider of retail technology, announces "Order Up", a Buy In-store Pickup Now (BISPUN) self-shopping technology operating on consumer devices. Leveraging a customer's smartphone in-store and at point of purchase now eliminates the need for retailers to purchase costly hardware and infrastructure with a disruptive retail technology for brick-and-mortar retail.

In the past, retailers implementing innovative technologies would deploy in-store using touch screen tablet technologies affixed to shelving, gondola or free-standing fixture. The cost and time of installation is now completely alleviated, whereby the customer can now use their own personal device to order product for immediate purchase. Customers access the technology by texting key words in the retail environments such as "Deli" and "Bakery" or scanning QR codes to show the full endless aisle assortment. This can further broaden the assortment without the requirement of merchandising as well offer affinities and incremental product offering.

Commenting on the new deployments, SYNQ founder & CEO Nolan Wheeler said, "we have had incredible success with the Order Up platform, whereby



in cases we see in excess of 12 per cent of top-line sales being transacted on through the Order Up technology. By offering the technology to retailers on a fully mobile basis, leveraging the purchasing power in the hands of consumers, we not only show faster ROI to the retailer but enable faster deployments and scale.

SYNQ Technology was also recently recognized by partner, Microsoft for success with Canadian Tire in keeping the wheels of commerce turning safely, tripling online sales with the help of Microsoft Teams. In this case, BOPIS (Buy Online Pickup In-Store) was delivered via SYNQ leveraging the power of MS Teams in the Canadian Tire Curbside Pickup execution.

SYNQ's Director of Business Development Ken Roberts added, "Our objective at SYNQ is to continue to level the playing field with online retail advantages for our brick-and-mortar customers. Developing solutions that enhance the shopping experience and reduce friction for customers has differentiated our business and ensured incredible ROI for our clients."

SYNQ has a strong presence in the retail channel, with their applications across an array of formats stores. Their platform has supported retailers in millions of ecommerce last mile deliveries, with hundreds of thousands of retail satisfaction reviews, and have deployed technologies in nearly 3,000 North American retail locations. Each SYNQ solution is fully measurable and accompanied by rich data made available in user-friendly reporting tools and presentation layer, enabling continued improvement and knowledge previously unavailable to retailers.

FOR MORE INFORMATION,
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Virtual Success CFIG'S Pivot to a Virtual Event Rose to the Challenge



COVID-19 has taken a huge toll on many industries, but the CFIG has shown that through innovation and resilience, they have been able to overcome the challenges facing businesses in the grocery industry today.

Starting with the remarkable success of GIC @HOME LIVE in November 2020, the CFIG followed up this last May with GSF West Live Retailer Connect which featured A.I. powered matchmaking meetings to grow business connections and sales. In fact, GSF West Live allowed even more retailers to attend, because it bypassed the need for costly travel, expensive accommodation, and significant downtime from their stores.

Speakers kicked off with Ron Tite (The Purpose-Driven Leadership and Marketing Expert) who lectured on "Grocery Leadership Redefined." This was followed by a closer look at what's driving retail innovation, presented by Neil Stern of Good Food Holdings and Amanda Lai from McMillanDoolittle. Keynotes were followed by workshops that included an overview of key issues and concerns facing the sector and independents and why it makes good business sense to have an accessible online and in-store experience for customers with disabilities.

The following day, Joel Gregoire of Mintel spoke on the environment and the Canadian food consumer. Amber Mac then presented a keynote on the three tech trends in a state of acceleration – a result of the fast pace of change from the COVID-19 era. The day was also filled with workshops presented by Neil Stern of Good Food Holdings and Amanda Lai of McMillanDoolittle, looking at such relevant topics as "Engineering a winning customer experience", which was followed by Amber Mac's fantastic session on "Redefining the customer experience", which was a deep dive into the future of building digital-first and in-person relationships with the Gen-Z audience.

The 58th Annual Canadian Independent Grocer of the Year Awards was presented in front of a virtual audience of the country's leading grocers, suppliers, and distributors.

The NATIONAL GOLD AWARD Winners for Top Independent Grocer of the Year for 2020 are:

Longo's - Mount Pleasant, Brampton, ON (Large Surface)
Battistelli's Your Independent Grocer, Lively, ON (Medium Surface)
Vince's Market, Tottenham, ON (Small Surface)

DAVID C. PARSONS AWARD OF EXCELLENCE IN SPECIALTY FOOD RETAILING (GOLD):
Yummy Market-Maple - Maple, ON

SPECIAL AWARDS

CFIG announced that Bruce Logan, Jerry Liedtke, Glenn Logan, Scott Logan, and Russell Logan of Village Food Markets, Sooke, BC, are awarded THE ARNOLD RANDS HERITAGE AWARD. The award is given to the year's best multi-generational store that is privately owned, and that has been in the same family for at least two generations, in the same community for 35 years.

CFIG ALSO INDUCTED THE FOLLOWING GROCERS INTO THE HALL OF FAME:
Brooke and Linda Kynoch and Team, Safety Mart Foods, Chase, BC.

NATIONAL AWARDS - GOLD, SILVER, BRONZE in Specialty Category

Bronze Award
Jeffrey Min and Jason Park, Galleria Supermarket, Oakville, ON

Silver Award
Brad Scott, Jane Scott and Jordyn Scott, BJ'S Country Market, Delaware, ON

David C. Parsons Award
Anna and Alexei Tsvetkov, Yummy Market-Maple, Maple, ON

REGIONAL AWARDS - SMALL, MEDIUM, LARGE

REGIONAL SMALL SURFACE CATEGORY
Management and Team, Pepper's Foods, Victoria, BC

ALBERTA/SASK./MANITOBA/NWT/NUNAVUT
Don Boos and Staff, Freson Bros. Hanna, Hanna, AB

ONTARIO
Carmen Trimarchi and Giancarlo Trimarchi, Vince's Market, Tottenham, ON

QUEBEC/ATLANTIC CANADA
Rebecca Stowe and Team, Belbin's Grocery, St. John's, NL

REGIONAL MEDIUM SURFACE CATEGORY
The Management and Team of Royal Oak, Country Grocer (Royal Oak), Victoria, BC

ALBERTA/SASK./MANITOBA/NWT/NUNAVUT
Aaron Coutts and Staff, Freson Bros., Barrhead, AB

ONTARIO
Brent Battistelli and Store Team, Battistelli's Your Independent Grocer, Lively, ON

QUEBEC /ATLANTIC CANADA
Dave Powell, Adam Powell, John Pritchett, and John Mercer, Powell's Supermarket, Bay Roberts, NL

REGIONAL LARGE SURFACE CATEGORY
The Management and Team of Bowen Road, Country Grocer - Bowen Road, Nanaimo, BC

ALBERTA/SASK./MANITOBA/NWT/NUNAVUT
Save-On-Foods Prince Albert Team, Save-On-Foods, Prince Albert, SK

ONTARIO
Longo's Mount Pleasant Team, Longo's - Mount Pleasant, Brampton, ON

QUEBEC/ATLANTIC CANADA
Justin Norman and Team, Colemans Garden Market, Corner Brook, NL

NATIONAL AWARDS - GOLD, SILVER, BRONZE IN SMALL/MEDIUM/LARGE

SMALL SURFACE CATEGORY

Bronze Award
Cory Davits and Team, Pepper's Foods, Victoria, BC

Silver Award
Rebecca Stowe and Team, Belbin's Grocery St. John's, NL

Gold Award
Carmen Trimarchi and Giancarlo Trimarchi, Vince's Market, Tottenham, ON

MEDIUM SURFACE CATEGORY

Bronze Award
Dave Powell, Adam Powell, John Pritchett, and John Mercer, Powell's Supermarket, Bay Roberts, NL

Silver Award
The Management and Team of Royal Oak, Country Grocer (Royal Oak), Victoria, BC

Gold Award
Brent Battistelli and Store Team, Battistelli's Your Independent Grocer, Lively, ON

LARGE SURFACE CATEGORY

Bronze Award
The Management and Team of Bowen Road, Country Grocer - Bowen Rd., Nanaimo, BC

Silver Award
Justin Norman and Team, Colemans Gardens Market, Corner Brook, NL

Gold Award
Longo's Mount Pleasant Team, Longo's - Mount Pleasant, Brampton, ON

RETAILERS VOTED THEIR TOP 10 IN GROCERY PICKS. THE WINNERS ARE:

Kiju Organic Fruit Bites - A. Lassonde
Watkins Organic Garlic & Herb Seasoning - Acosta
BinBreeze Lavender - BinBreeze
World Taco Kit - Korean BBQ Inspired - General Mills
Candied Salmon Jerky - Hardy Buoy's
Smoked Fish Inc.
Water Kefir Strawberry Rosehip Flavour - Kindred Cultures
Compostable Produce Bags - LEAF Environmental Products Inc.
Shredded Feta - Saputo Dairy Products Canada GP.
Chocolate Chip Cookie Mix - Susgrainable Health Foods Inc.
Angostura Cocoa Bitters - Tree of Life

RETAIL COLLABORATION

By Jeff Doucette

Hard Discount - Ready For Launch?

FRESHCO EXPANSION BREATHES NEW LIFE INTO THE FORMAT

When I started my career in the CPG industry, I was based in Toronto and managing Loblaw's national procurement for one of my employers major categories. While we always were keen to jump on the plane and head to Calgary for meetings and an extended weekend in the mountains (those were the days), I must admit that it was hard to understand just how different the competitive dynamic was in the West compared to Ontario.

In Ontario, we were obsessed with the growth of No Frills and to a lesser extent Walmart and we barely had any Superstores back then. Meanwhile, my colleagues in the West were hyper-focused on Superstore. It was a bit "exotic" to stop into an Extra Foods in Airdrie or a Save On Foods on the Island and see the players that we did not have in Ontario.

In Ontario, the Hard Discount format dominates the grocery landscape with No Frills, Food Basics and Freshco all doing battle with Walmart and RCSS for the lowest priced basket. It has been many years since the Hard Discount format made up over 50 per cent of total dollar sales in Ontario.

The West on the other hand has had a different path. Superstore was predominantly the price leader with the rest of the market happier to keep its distance and playing in the proximity/full-service space with higher service and higher margins. Before it was purchased by Sobeys, Safeway seemed to flex its strategy from aggressive to passive depending on the needs of the US business when it came to

volume or profit. Save On Foods used to be this sleepy little business but in the past decade has turned on the after-burners to stretch all the way east to Winnipeg and north to Whitehorse.

Of course, the No Frills banner has been in the West for quite a while now, although it was more of a convenient cover story to consolidate the Extra Foods banner than it was a play to truly bring the Hard Discount model to the West, which would have had a significant impact on its big brother - RCSS.

Looking eastwards, we see that Ontario has 173 No Frills locations to serve a population of 14.8 million (1 store per 86,000) while the West has just 80 No Frills stores to serve a population of 12.3 million (1 store per 153,000). Additionally, many No Frills stores in the West can be found in the smaller communities that were previously served by Extra Foods, instead of the major urban centres where the yellow stores are found in Ontario.

But there is a new player in the Hard Discount space in the West which has been rather quietly building out a network of newly renovated and well-located stores, inheriting many under-performing Sobeys and Safeway locations as Sobeys looks to shore up their business in Western Canada.

There are already 28 Freshco stores in the West and many more in the pipeline. This compares to the 94 Freshco stores in Ontario, many of which were converted from the Price Chopper banner in the 2000s.

Aside from price, Hard Discount's recipe for success includes three major elements including local franchisees who know their local market extremely well, proximity to population centres and transit and serving ethnic communities in a hyper-local way, truly competing with ethnic focused retailers in a range of communities.

Freshco's "Chalo" sub-brand is a great example. These stores are designed to serve the South Asian community through assortment and location and we already have four of these store in the West and room for more in communities like Chestermere and East Calgary in Alberta and throughout the Lower Mainland in British Columbia.

How many Hard Discount stores could the West support? As a guide we can look at the 406 No Frills, Food Basics and Freshco stores in Ontario, which works out to one store for every 36,000 residents. In Quebec, there are a total of 213 Maxi & Super C stores; or one store for every 40,000 residents.

Using the mid-point of Quebec and Ontario, the Western market could support about 325 Hard Discount stores based on population, compared to the 108 stores we have today. This means that Freshco has quite a bit of runway ahead of it to grow.

Sobeys has some great real-estate across the West, thanks mainly to its Safeway purchase and this could lead to a quick explosion of green stores popping up from the Lakehead to the Coast. Just how fast they can close and convert without disrupting short term volumes and profits will be a delicate balance, but it seems like Sobeys is dedicated to making this work.

Of course, there is always the "nuclear" scenario, where one of the true Hard Discounters like Germany's Aldi or Lidl (both of whom are in the US already) decides that they want to enter our market. They grow store count and share very fast by using the hub-and-spoke model for stores and warehouses and a laser focus on private label. Supporting a made in Canada expansion of Hard Discount is the preferred option for retailers and suppliers alike by a long shot.

If Hard Discount gets bigger there will be massive challenges ahead for conventional operators who are already under pressure from RCSS, Walmart and Costco as well as their full-service competition. Full service will always be relevant, but only the strongest will survive.

It seems like Sobeys has seen the writing on the wall and is determined to be the aggressor instead of one of the banners that slowly has its market share picked away by lower cost rivals. It will be interesting to continue to watch the Freshco roll-out across the West and see how the other players react to this new competitor. ●



Jeff Doucette is the founder of "Field Agent Canada" an on-demand panel of Canadian shoppers providing a suite of innovative services to Canadian retailers and brands. He can be reached at jeff.doucette@fieldagentcanada.com

Next year's event will take place live on April 25 & 26 2022 at the Vancouver Convention Centre East. See www.GSFShow.com for details.