

by A. Elizabeth Sloan

Nouveau Snacking

Consumers are snacking much more frequently. According to Technomic Inc.'s *2012 Snacking Occasion Consumer Trend Report*, about half (48%) of the population snacks at least twice a day, double the 2010 level of 25%.

Seven in 10 snacks are eaten in the home, reports Technomic. Fresh fruit, crackers/cookies, cereal, potato chips/pretzels, ice cream, and cheese are the most popular at-home snacks. Workplace snacking is also on the rise along with brown-bagging snacks to work.

With those ages 18–34 driving the net gain in snacking behavior, the snack market will continue to grow. Packaged Fact's *Snack Foods in the U.S.* report projects that U.S. retail sales of packaged snacks will top \$76.8 billion by 2015. Drug and convenience stores posted volume gains in snack sales in 2011, according to SymphonyIRI data.

Three-quarters of consumers snack in the midafternoon, Technomic reports. Four in 10 snack in the midmorning, mid-evening, and late at night; a.m. snacking rose 9% since 2010, according to Technomic. Indulgent snacks (e.g., ice cream, salty snacks, chocolate, snack nuts, and cookies) are most prevalent in the evening; fruit, baked goods, and coffee/tea are common midmorning.

Flavor/taste, cited by 83% of those polled, trumps all other factors in the snack purchase; 39% are motivated by new or unique

flavors, explains Technomic. IRI reports that 34% of consumers are willing to pay more for gourmet snacks, up from 18% in 2009. According to a 2012 report from the National Association for the Specialty Food Trade, gourmet chips, pretzels, and snacks were the third-largest specialty food category with sales of \$1.8 billion in 2011. With 75% of adults considering snacks as an important part of social occasions and 37% entertaining family/friends at home vs going out in 2012, gourmet snacks and appetizers will continue to be in high

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demand, IRI data suggests.

Sales volume for healthy snacks continued to outpace indulgent snacks in 2011, but by a smaller margin than in the past five years. Just under half of consumers are snacking on healthier items in 2012, according to Technomic. The nutritional snacks/trail mix category was the top sales volume gainer among healthy snacks in 2011, up 11.1%, reports IRI. Hummus was also hot, according to IRI, with sales up 10.5%.

The types of foods Americans are eating as snacks have broadened. In 2011, sales of refrigerated appetizers/snack rolls were up 5.9%, hand-held breakfast entrees +3.6, and frozen appetizers/snack rolls +3.3%, according to IRI. These categories were right

behind chocolate-covered salted snacks, with sales up 8.6%, and dried meat snacks, +6.0%, as the top volume gainers among indulgent snacks in 2011, per IRI.

More than half (55%) of consumers eat restaurant French fries/onion rings, 54% single hamburgers/small sandwiches, and 49% a slice of restaurant pizza as away-from-home snacks, reports Technomic. Expect mini ethnic morsels (e.g., empanadas, pupusas, etc.) to become a strong snack sector.

Mini desserts/bites rank ninth on the list of hot menu items

While two-thirds (67%) of consumers eat granola, cereal, or breakfast bars, only 28% are users of energy bars, a statistic that is virtually unchanged since 2007–2008. Half (56%) of consumers look for snacks that offer an energy boost; 78% seek products that are filling. Sales volume of snacks carrying a high protein tag jumped 28% in 2011, according to IRI.

No *trans* fat and “beyond basic nutrition” (e.g., antioxidants) are the most desired healthy snack product attributes, cited by 60% of consumers; fresh/not processed,

in fast food in 2012; snack-sized items are 15th, according to the National Restaurant Assn.'s (NRA) *What's Hot?* survey. Egg rolls, nachos, quesadillas, spring rolls, and hummus are among the most-ordered restaurant appetizers, according to Technomic's *2010 Appetizer Consumer Trend Report*. Vegetarian items, ethnic street-food-inspired appetizers, charcuterie, and bite-sized hors d'oeuvres are the top trendy appetizers for 2012, per the NRA survey.

Three in 10 snacks consumed in 2012 were beverages, according to Technomic. Restaurant/beverage bar coffee sales are projected to reach \$20.7 billion by 2017, tea \$9.7 billion, according to Packaged Fact's *Coffee and Tea Foodservice Trends in the U.S.* report.

whole grain, low fat, high fiber, all natural, low calorie, no preservatives/additives, low sugar, low cholesterol, and vitamins/minerals were cited by more than 50% of consumers, according to IRI.

IRI reports that 78% of parents want snacks with added nutrients for their kids; 59% seek fresh/not processed, 56% lower fat, and 43% lower calorie—all up significantly in the past two years. Lastly, portion size is emerging as a snack concern for women; two-thirds (67%) of women say it is important that the portion size is not too large, Technomic reports. **FT**



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