

by A. Elizabeth Sloan

Super-Savvy Shopping

Today's budget-weary food shoppers approach grocery shopping in a much more deliberate manner, redefining what is essential by trading down or making substitutions for some convenient products and pricier items. The October 2009 issue of *Times & Trends* by Information Resources Inc. (IRI) indicates that 91% of consumers shop for food that tastes good, 72% shop for nutritious/whole-some meals, 66% shop for food that is easy or quick to prepare, 65% shop for their favorite foods, and 58% shop for low-cost items. Moreover, the frequency of shoppers' grocery trips is the lowest in 37 years: approximately two trips per week with weekly spending essentially remaining flat or declining when inflation is taken into account.

During these less frequent grocery trips, 64% of shoppers relied on home-prepared lists and purchased fewer individual servings (such as 100-calorie packs), favorite treats, organic products, and fresh produce. Young adults are the most frugal: 62% make a list, 59% base the list on ingredients for recipes, 41% list categories to buy, 44% use coupons to create the list, and 8% use the Internet, according to IRI's October 2009 report.

In fact, when consumers experience an increase in expenses, frozen desserts, chocolate candy, ice cream, cookies, salty snacks, frozen entrées, carbonated soft drinks, frozen pizza, wine, bottled water, juice,

and beer are items that they cut from the budget, per a report by the Food Marketing Institute (FMI). Consumers are least likely to eliminate milk, eggs, pasta, bread/rolls, cheese, butter, cold cereal, peanut butter, soup, spaghetti sauces, frozen vegetables, frozen poultry, coffee, yogurt, and crackers. This may explain why more gourmet food sections have appeared in many supermarkets. Nearly seven in 10 supermarkets (69%) have a gourmet food section, according to FMI.

Regardless of the apparent trend toward gourmet foods,

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before consumers plop down their funds, more than three-quarters of them (76%) check the price when buying a product for the first time, reports FMI. Approximately 47% of consumers check nutrition information. For example, at least half of shoppers scan food items for fat content, checking grams of *trans*, saturated, and total fat. At least four in 10 consumers check for calories, sugar, salt/sodium, whole grains, chemical additives, and cholesterol. Other ingredients or claims Americans look for include the kind of artificial sweeteners, high fructose corn syrup, natural or organic ingredients, geographic origin, MSG, dairy content, genetically modified organisms, fair trade, and

the use of hormones.

Brand names and health claims are the next items consumers peruse before making purchases, at 26% and 25% respectively. Perhaps this is why the percentage of consumers checking the glycemic indices and prebiotic or probiotic content remains only in the teens, according to FMI. As a result, calcium and low-fat claims have fallen off the list of the top 10 most sought after package claims.

The economic downturn appears to be affecting the decisions consumers make about

sandwiches, prepared salad, other meats, pizza, fish/seafood, and soup are the most purchased take-out items, according to Technomic's *2008 Take-out Report*. Heat-and-serve options were of interest to four of 10 shoppers (43%), made-to-order sandwiches to 33%, extensive salad bars to 32%, and hot food buffets to 30%.

The damaged economy has repositioned self care and healthier eating as money-saving strategies among food shoppers. IRI's October 2009 *Times & Trends* confirms that 61% of shoppers are eating to manage a

where to shop. The majority visit at least four different store formats monthly: 75% visit a supermarket almost every time they shop or fairly often, 39% visit a supercenter and/or a discount store, 29% a club store, 18% a limited assortment store, 12% an organic food store, 7% an ethnic specialty store, and 6% a convenience store. Supercenters and limited assortment stores showed the biggest increases in visit frequency while shopper visits to full-service supermarkets declined, according to the *FMI Trends 2009* report.

When it comes to supermarket take-out, 49% of shoppers are most interested in ready-to-eat solutions. After rotisserie and fried chicken, side dishes,

health condition. More specifically, nine in 10 shoppers (89%) say they're concerned about the nutritional content of their food; those that are very concerned rose from 41% to 46% in 2009.

However, only 8% of supermarkets have health clinics, and 16% of consumers use such health clinics regularly. Younger shoppers are the most likely to use in-store clinics. Although only 6% of stores have a nutritionist in the store, one in five shoppers consults with in-store nutritionists when they are available. **FT**



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