

The Grocer

Focus On: Ready meals & Microwaveable by Andrew Lusher (Andrew.Lusher@gmail.com)

Publishing: 18 February
Advertising deadline: 2 February
Submissions deadline: 27 January

The Story

Britain's supermarkets have sold an extra £62m worth of chilled ready meals in the past year, while sales of frozen ready meals have dropped £24.5m. What's going on? Are consumers, and retailers, switching to chilled from frozen? Why? Are rising average prices in frozen and chilled the result of premium NPD, price rises on existing products or something else? And which cuisines are Brits plumping for when it comes to their ready meals?

Key themes:

Cuisines: This feature will explore the types of world cuisines that have proven most popular, and unpopular, over the past year and the reasons for this. Given the Brexit vote, it might come as something of a surprise that European dishes are the fastest growing in ready meals. Why is this and how are traditional British dishes faring?

Retailers: Central to this feature will be an exploration of how different retailers are approaching the sector, in terms of their own label and branded offerings, promotions (particularly dine in for £10 type deals) and so on. Whose ready meal sales are in growth? Whose are in decline? Why?

Brands v own label: Own label is outperforming brands in this category. This feature will explore the key reasons why, paying particularly close attention to what brands are doing to carve out greater share of the market and how retailers are developing and promoting their own label ranges.

Premium lines: To what extent is market growth being driven by the development of premium branded and own label lines? Which ranges are in strongest growth and what are the factors favouring them?

TV dinners and meal kits: This feature will pay close attention to the formats proving most popular in ready meals at present. Does the traditional, microwaveable TV dinner hold the same sway it did in the past or is it being usurped by more premium, foil packed products designed to be heated in an oven? What about meal kits such as Bigham's Pan Fry or Waitrose Dinner for Tonight?

Innovation: This will be central to this feature. We will explore the latest innovations and the trends that have driven their development. A key question will be: what's next for ready meals? We will profile four of the latest, most interesting new products in the sector in a separate innovations panel.

Promotions and price: This feature will explore how the promotional strategies of retailers and brands have changed over the past year, particularly in light of the relative strength of own label. Attention will be paid to the promotional strategies of retailers and how this has affected prices.

Key questions the feature is likely to address:

- What consumer trends have impacted the category over the past year?
- How have promotional strategies (both in terms of price and marketing) evolved?
- How have individual retailers' strategies impacted the market?
- How has merchandising changed in the market?
- What impact has own-label had on branded players?
- What's next for the category?