

# The Grocer

**Focus On: Ready Meals and Soup by Natalie Brown ([natalie\\_brown@live.co.uk](mailto:natalie_brown@live.co.uk))**

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## The Story

**Britain's love affair with the microwave continues. Not deterred by winning the dubious accolade of the top ready meal consumer in Europe last February, British shoppers spent more on ready meals over the past year and volumes are also up. But our tastes are becoming ever more sophisticated. Oriental meals showed the highest rate of growth and average prices on these meals are also up significantly. So what exactly are these new cuisines persuading us to deviate from the usual choices? Who is winning from this desire for express oriental? And what cuisine could be next on the cards?**

## Key themes:

**High-end oriental:** English cuisine remains top of the tree in terms of ready meal sales but the fastest growth area is further east including Chinese, Thai plus Japanese, Vietnamese and Malaysian. So what new products/brands are driving this consumption? Why this sudden interest? And what will be the next big cuisine e.g. Korean?

**Ultra convenience:** The consistent increase in the quality of ready meals means consumers are more likely to see them as a takeaway alternative. We take a look at the retailers looking to capitalise on this new area of growth by offering a takeaway-style home delivery service.

**Own label:** Own label remains the growth area in ready meals. M&S remains the king of the ready meal with a fifth of the total market share but other less premium brands are making some surprising gains including Co-op, Iceland, Aldi and Lidl. Is this fuelled by their premium ranges?

**Can't cook, won't cook:** While ready meals have grown across all retailers, have their attempts to offer a convenient 'meal for tonight' solution involving elements of cooking fallen flat?

**Soup:** Despite the increasing trend for convenience, the soup category is struggling this year. Volume sales are down across chilled, canned and dry soups – the first time chilled has fallen in many years. Why is this?

**Ready meal innovations:** Four new products or product ranges that have not appeared in The Grocer before, including image, launch date and RSP.

**Soup innovations:** Four new products or product ranges that have not appeared in The Grocer before, including image, launch date and RSP.

## 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?