

The Grocer

Focus On: Ready Meals & Microwaveable by Amy North (amy.north@thegrocer.co.uk)

Publishing: 20 February
Advertising deadline: 5 February
Submissions deadline: 29 January

The Story:

Wow! It's not often a sector shows growth in excess of £150m in a single year, particularly in today's deflationary environment, but that's what the latest data on ready meals is showing. That's even more impressive considering frozen ready meals were rocked by one of the biggest food contamination scandals of recent years in 2013. So what's driving the growth? Which retailers, brands and manufacturers are cashing in? Is anyone being left behind?

Key themes:

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 alternatives: 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 the just-add-water products and microwaveable pot meals?

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.

Brands v own label: Brands are outperforming own label 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.

World cuisines: This feature will also explore the types of cuisines that have proven most popular, and unpopular, over the past year and the reasons for this. For example, why are American ready meals proving so popular while other cuisines are going cold? Attention will be paid to the brands and retailers behind the cuisines' performances.

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 average 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?