

High street food retail – is artisan the new norm?

By Charles Manners

Over the past few years we have seen continuous changes on the high street, which directly influence university catering offers setting students and staff expectations. The key trend that is driving this change is the consumer's interest in self health and a willingness to experiment, and pay higher prices for premium, authentic and artisan products. Though this trend is not new, what is now firmly established is how the consumer needs are being addressed by the high street operators.

There is also a much greater interest in food. The broad support for the recently announced sugar tax, which was originally championed by Jamie Oliver, is another example of the health issue moving up both the social and political agenda.

It was fascinating to hear from Clive Schlee; Pret A Manger's Chief Executive in his company blog, stating: "Ten years ago, Pret's granary sandwiches made up nearly 30% of our sales – in 2016 they will account for less than 10%."

They have been replaced by a variety of new and less bready products – protein pots, grain salads, cold-pressed juices, etc. Research reveals that the UK alternative sandwich market (i.e filled snacks made from pittas, thins, wraps etc rather than slices of bread), has grown by 15% in the past year.



The new Costa Coffee Fresco site on London's Tottenham Court Road aims to capitalise on the blurring of the lines between coffee shops and grab-and-go outlets, while using Costa's heritage and strong brand. The food capture rate is 60–70% at its Fresco trial site versus the 42% Costa estate average, and Costa hope that a fresher and healthier range will boost lunch trade where it is traditionally weak. Currently, Costa's food offer is oriented to sweet treats and centrally produced paninis, and it underperforms on food in the key lunchtime day part.

The challenge smaller operators have is to produce many of these products requires a highly mechanised and standardised approach, but self-developed product development which has energy and excitement can be as if not more effective. The new message is that 'artisan is the new norm'!

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