

CFVG

CONVENIENCE FOODSERVICE
VISION GROUP

CFVG MEMBERS



VISION GROUP NETWORK CO-FOUNDERS



The Power of Sensory Science in Convenience Retail

CFVG VISION REPORT NO. 1
FEBRUARY 2025

FACILITATOR



Richard Poye
COO, *Food Trends Think Tank*

FEATURED SPEAKER



Rachel Toner
Founder and Technical Director,
Taste Strategy



sharing today to shape tomorrow

We are Convenience Foodservice Vision Group (CFVG), a group of invited leaders from across the convenience sector who have volunteered our time to help our fellow culinary, marketing, operations, technology, sensory, safety, and select solution providers. The only reason we gather is to discuss, debate and share our experiences and ideas. Each of us is offering our personal opinions. We are not looking for “group think.” We make our conversations available to everyone in the industry through CFVG Vision Reports.

These reports will help you better understand current challenges, solutions, and opportunities while giving you access to different opinions and perspectives.

Convenience Foodservice Vision Group is part of the Vision Group Network, whose mission is to gather the best minds in the industry, put them in a virtual room, and let the ideas and opinions develop.

This **CFVG Vision Report** is comprised of three parts:

CFVG Views provides a summary of the conversation with additional resources for extra context including “Valuable Resources” for more in-depth information.

In The Room With CFVG provides you with the meeting transcript, tagged for easy reference, so that you can be “in the room” with us, rather than only having access to selected quotes and paraphrasing.

The full **presentation**, “Sensory Strategies for Convenience Retail: Reframing the Customer Experience” is included and linked throughout the transcript for easy navigation.

We highly recommend that you read all three components.

The main topics in this CFVG Vision Report:

Sensory Strategies for Convenience Retail

Creating a Multisensory Brand Experience on a Budget

Ensuring Food Quality in an Omnichannel World

Creating a Cohesive Sensory Experience

Overcoming Blind Spots in Customer Experience

Small Operator Sensory Guide



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Founded in 1894, McLane Company Inc. is one of the largest distributors in America, serving convenience stores, mass merchants, and chain restaurants. As an industry-leading partner to the biggest retail and restaurant businesses, McLane buys, sells, delivers, and serves the world's most beloved brands. With headquarters in Temple, Texas, McLane has more than 80 distribution centers across the country, employs more than 25,000 teammates, and delivers to nearly every zip code in the U.S. McLane is a wholly owned subsidiary of Berkshire Hathaway, Inc.

McLane Fresh, McLane's retail foodservice program, offers unmatched value to convenience store operators by forming strategic partnerships based on tailored insights. The McLane Fresh team provides customized recommendations and seamless execution. Leveraging extensive data, McLane supplies programs and products that drive profitability, focusing on efficiency, transparency, and predictability. Their easy-to-execute packages minimize the need for skilled labor, boost sales with merchandising strategies, and include the right equipment bundles. McLane offers quality products at competitive prices, adhering to top food safety standards, along with fast, fresh and cost-effective deliveries.

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Transform your operation with Upshop's foodservice operating system - the first platform that seamlessly connects all store workflows with an AI-powered replenishment system. From inventory and ordering to food production and waste management, unlock unprecedented efficiency and insights. Imagine the possibilities when your entire foodservice operation speaks the same digital language, driving profitability and growth across every location.

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In The Room with CFVG

Presentation

CFVG VIEWS

A CONVENIENCE FOODSERVICE VISION GROUP DISCUSSION

This meeting of the Convenience Foodservice Vision Group (CFVG) focused on the power of sensory science in shaping customer experience within convenience retail. It featured a presentation by **Rachel Toner** of Taste Strategy. After the presentation, members were able to ask questions and share their own experiences, followed by suggestions for future meeting topics.



The Power of Sensory Science in Convenience Retail

The inaugural January 23, 2025, CFVG quarterly virtual meeting was facilitated by **Richard Poye**, chief operating officer at Food Trends Think Tank. The meeting featured guest speaker **Rachel Toner**, founder and technical director of Taste Strategy, with her presentation, “Sensory

Strategies for Convenience Retail: Reframing the Customer Experience.” The presentation highlighted the impact of sensory science on convenience consumers and business outcomes, while also presenting practical approaches that can be applied to various business strategies.



CFVG Views

In The Room with CFVG

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Ingredients for Thought-Leading Success

Myra Kressner, president, Kressner Strategy Group and Vision Group Network co-founder, welcomed attendees to this first meeting emphasizing the group's vital role within the Vision Group Network (VGN). "We are extremely fortunate that Richard [Poye] reached out to us about a year ago with his vision for elevating convenience foodservice," she noted, crediting him as the driving force behind CFVG.

The Vision Group Network was founded during COVID "when everyone was looking for some sense of community," Kressner explained. The Vision Group (TVG), the first venture, created a space for real-time

problem-solving among experts in convenience, grocery, foodservice and academia. Since then, VGN has expanded to include seven specialized groups addressing industry disruptions with more in the works.

Convenience Leaders Vision Group (CLVG) launched in 2022 to bring together CEOs, while Convenience Technology Vision Group (CTVG), launched in early 2023, and the newer Connexus Vision Group (CxVG), launched in late 2024, both engage retailers and solution providers in shaping and executing technology innovation. More recently, Electric Vehicles Vision Group (evVG) was formed to address mobility and EV infrastructure.

The network's reach is now global, with the Global Convenience Vision Group (GCVG) connecting CEOs across continents and around the world.

A defining feature of these groups is their commitment to sharing knowledge. "Our goal is not conformity, rather problem-solving and forward-thinking," Kressner stated, reinforcing the mission: Sharing Today to Shape Tomorrow. Through Vision Reports and other mediums, VGN ensures that industry insights are widely available to shape the future of convenience.

CFVG members shared their foodservice experience or "aha" moments while dealing with food. Short excerpts of each member's introductory comments are in the "In Their Own Words" section and in full detail in "In The Room". Poye, a seasoned veteran in many sectors of foodservice including as a fine dining chef, CPG product expert, and now retail foodservice consultant emphasized the unique role of the Convenience Foodservice Vision Group, stating, "There's not really a consistent share group within the convenience sector that takes the information from that group and publicizes it." CFVG's goal is to be a think tank where members can "get to know each other better and share our experiences" while also elevating the industry's perception.



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Sensory Strategies for Convenience Retail

Toner explained her passion for sensory-driven consumer experiences. Her background includes a research-based master's degree in food science from Penn State, three years in consumer packaged goods research and development, and seven years leading sensory strategy and product innovation at Wawa.

She shared that her “aha” moment in foodservice came during her time at Wawa, where she realized the untapped potential of sensory science in the convenience space. That realization fueled her decision to start Taste Strategy, allowing her to share this powerful science and help businesses create more engaging consumer experiences to enhance taste, smell, appearance, sound, and texture to drive results.

Setting the stage, Toner explained the transformative role sensory science can play to drive both consumer satisfaction and business success. She championed that sensory science, often overlooked in industries like convenience retail, is an essential tool for innovation and improving customer experience.

She began by challenging attendees to view their stores through a fresh customer lens, free of bias and adaptation. Using examples like Procter & Gamble's “nose blind” campaign for Febreze, she illustrated how businesses can miss critical sensory elements that influence customer perceptions. The campaign highlighted how people become desensitized to odors in their homes—like a lingering pet smell—while guests immediately notice them.

By revealing this blind spot, Febreze positioned itself as the solution, demonstrating the power of uncovering overlooked sensory experiences. She advocated stepping back, asking consumers for feedback, and measuring their sensory experiences to identify what truly resonates, or detracts, from the overall experience.

In discussing sensory science, Toner highlighted its validity as a measurable and actionable field. By leveraging sensory research, businesses can better understand how their products and environments are perceived.

“ Sensory and consumer feedback can be that secret sauce that can provide the data to inform how to improve the customer experience or how to outperform the competition.

Rachel Toner, Founder and Technical Director, Taste Strategy



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She shared another example of Kraft's successful reformulation of Mac & Cheese without artificial ingredients, a process informed by three years of sensory testing to ensure the product remained indistinguishable to consumers. QSR Wendy's also benefited from sensory data to substantiate bold taste claims about its fries, helping to solidify its competitive edge.

She also emphasized the importance of executive support to make sensory-driven improvements possible. Sensory science, she explained, is not a standalone solution but a critical part of a broader strategy that includes high-quality ingredients, consumer insights and a commitment to excellence. She illustrated how sensory research supports busi-

ness decisions, citing examples where sensory testing helped validate product improvements or identify challenges like cost, shelf life or operational complexity.

Toner then shifted to the customer journey, underscoring how sensory experiences begin long before a customer enters a store and continue through their interaction with the environment and products. Retailers set consumer expectations through digital and visual branding, which must align with the in-store experience to avoid disappointment and disenfranchised customers. Factors like lighting, scent, cleanliness and even the tactile and auditory experiences of equipment significantly impact perceptions of quality and satisfaction.

She used vivid examples, such as Marriott's signature scent and the multi-sensory engagement of bean-to-cup coffee machines in coffee shops, to illustrate how sensory cues create lasting impressions. She advised businesses to evaluate their environments critically and ensure they evoke positive, memorable associations.

Finally, Toner addressed the importance of meeting or exceeding consumer expectations to bridge the "expectation versus reality" gap. She warned against overpromising and underdelivering, emphasizing the need for consistency in quality to build trust and loyalty.



“ Scent and smell, above all of the other senses, evoke the strongest memories because of their connections to parts of the brain that are responsible for emotion, for associations and for memory.

*Rachel Toner, Founder and Technical Director,
Taste Strategy*

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Creating a Multisensory Brand Experience on a Budget



Roy Strasburger, CEO, StrasGlobal, president of Compliance Safe, and Vision Group Network co-founder, asked Toner how smaller retailers without the resources of massive corporations can create a strong sensory brand experience. Toner explained that sensory branding should be approached with clear objectives and suggested using sensory walkthroughs where customers provide real-time feedback on how they feel in the store environment. Strasburger pushed for a more proactive approach to intentionally create a specific sensory brand experience rather than just identifying problems. Toner acknowledged the validity of this approach and reiterated

that sensory branding is multisensory and must be cohesive. “I think it’s determining the level and the congruence of all of the sensory elements that build that feeling, that brand, that sensory experience,” she said.

Eva Strasburger, president, StrasGlobal, CEO of Compliance Safe, and Vision Group Network co-founder, elaborated with an example of a cookie retailer that carefully curates scent, sound, color, and texture to evoke a specific emotional response. “You walk in, you smell the cookies, they pick the smell of the most popular one, which they pump out. They generally have happy music playing...They have colors

visually that imply this is a fun place... The floor is done in a certain texture... It’s the temperature of the store.” She emphasized that all sensory elements—smell, music, visuals, texture, and temperature—must align to create the intended customer experience.

Toner agreed, adding that from a scientific perspective, altering and measuring one variable at a time is crucial.

Later in the discussion, Poye asked **Mike Weber**, chief marketing officer, Upshop, if there are ways that his company measure sensory, or if there are certain steps in place so that retailers could make sure they deliver on sensory tools. Weber shared how

Upshop is incorporating sensory elements into its guided task process. He explained that by customizing store walks, retailers can identify key moments like those critical sensory touchpoints that shape the customer experience. This process, for which Upshop utilizes AI to prioritize key moments, is designed to enhance customer experience, especially in labor-light situations. Weber also emphasized the power of sensory cues, recalling how, at convenience chain Ricker’s, they made the sound of ice cubes in their fountain a “hero” moment, driving customers to make purchases through that use of sensory.

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A strong sensory brand experience isn't about a single element, it's the harmony of scent, sound, visuals, texture, and temperature that shapes customer perception. While large companies invest heavily in research, smaller retailers can take a practical approach by conducting sensory walkthroughs, testing prototypes, and gathering real-time customer feedback. An intentional, cohesive sensory strategy can elevate a brand and create a lasting impression without requiring a massive budget.

Ensuring Food Quality in an Omnichannel World

Weber raised a question about the challenges of food delivery and e-commerce, referencing In-N-Out Burger's transparency with fry preparation to set customer expectations. He also pointed out that some food items don't travel well, making delivery a potential challenge. "You only have so much time to get it prepared and delivered, and I feel like that's probably a much bigger challenge as you think about growing your business," he said. However, he emphasized that food delivery and e-commerce is going to "make or break the channel over time" and that there's a "huge upside to taking foodservice to omnichannel."

Toner acknowledged that delivery presents unique challenges, particularly in maintaining product quality. She emphasized the importance of setting clear customer expectations and explained that companies need to assess product risk, using the example of a cold foam beverage that may be available in delivery, but by the time it gets to the customer, the cold foam is completely gone, and it's no longer a cold foam beverage. She suggested managing these challenges through two approaches: ensuring items meet a "delivery standard" before offering them for delivery and limiting the delivery menu to items that can maintain quality.

Regarding e-commerce, Toner noted that while research is still growing, it's critical to understand how product presentation affects customer perception. Convenience operators also need to be clear about what customers can expect, using product descriptions, images, and packaging to set realistic expectations. There's growing research on how online visuals influence taste perception, meaning businesses must be strategic in how they present their offerings digitally. Ultimately, the omnichannel experience should be designed around maintaining consistency and ensuring that customers receive a product that aligns with what they anticipated.

Connexus Vision Group (CxVG) will soon be releasing a report, "Third-Party Delivery: A Double-Edged Sword?" examining third party delivery challenges and opportunities in convenience retail. This report will be released in March 2025 and will be available at vgnsharing.com.



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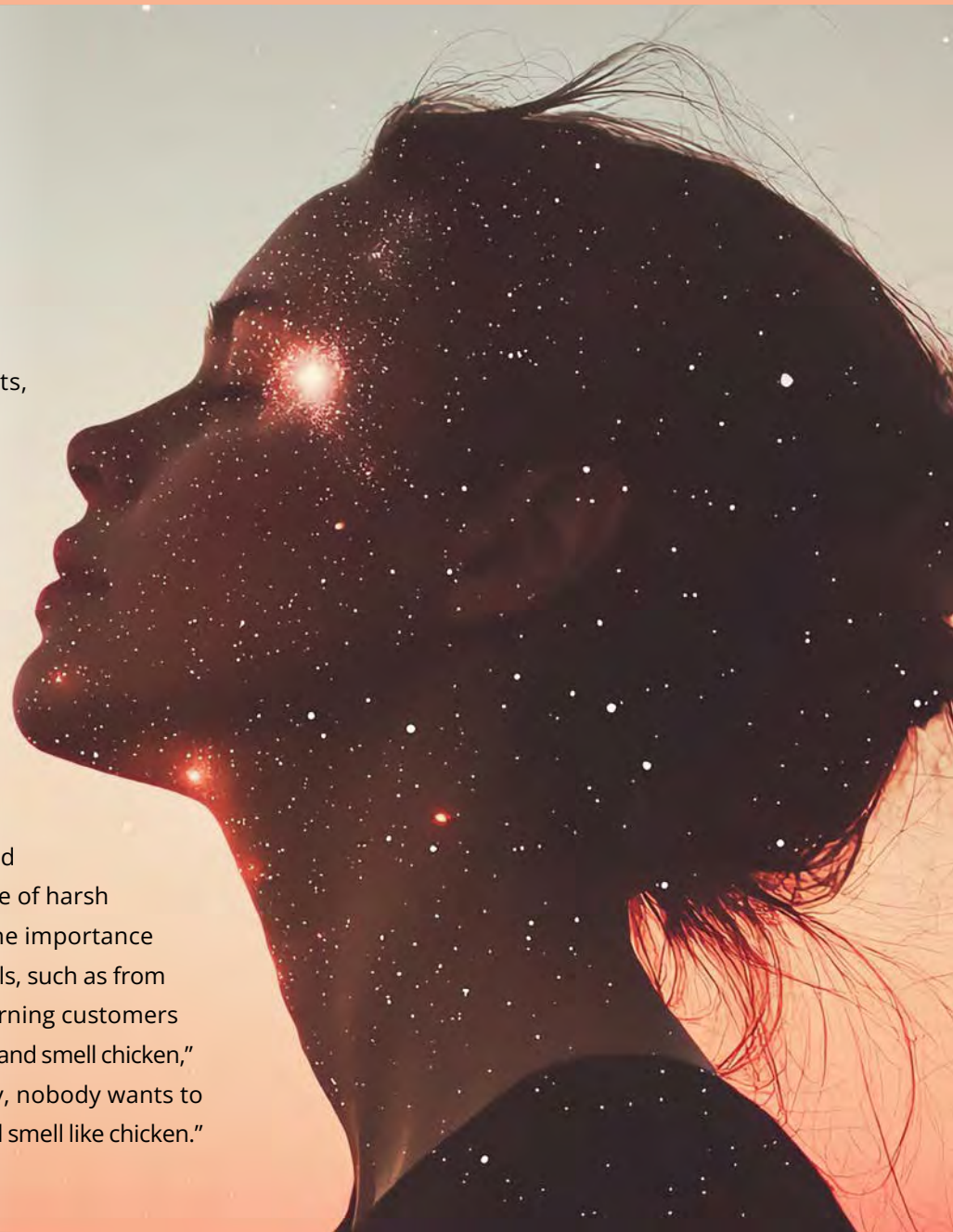
Presentation

Creating a Cohesive Sensory Experience

Members concurred on the importance of a holistic approach to sensory experiences, emphasizing the integration of foodservice, marketing and operations. Poye discussed the broad application of sensory elements across a store, not just in food-service but in the entire customer experience, and pointed out that sensory elements like cleanliness, music, and even non-food smells (e.g., chemicals or strong odors) affect the customer's perception before they even enter the store. "To me, it's about the entire store experience and how do you bring other partners in other areas of the store, whether it's operations, marketing, other categories together to really think about sensory and how they could do it really well?"

Barbara Kessler, senior director, food and beverage at The Wills Group (Dash In), said that her company's latest stores and concept "turn the head around on traditional convenience." She highlighted the impact of visual and sensory cues,

like air flow, clean parking lots, and well-lit areas, on customer decision-making. She stresses that the choice to stop at a store begins before entering, based on external cues, cleanliness, and overall appearance. "The decision to even stop at a convenience store starts before you ever leave your car," she said. Once inside, the store should feel clean, welcoming, and free of harsh smells. She also mentioned the importance of addressing unpleasant smells, such as from foodservice areas, to avoid turning customers away. "Nobody wants to walk in and smell chicken," she added. "More importantly, nobody wants to walk out and get in their car and smell like chicken."



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Agreeing with Kessler, **Jon Cox**, vice president, retail foodservice at McLane, expanded the point that sensory cues start before customers even step foot in the store. He adds that the condition of bathrooms, trash, and lighting plays a significant role in the overall experience. “It doesn’t matter how clean your store is or how good your food is if the bathrooms aren’t clean,” he said.

Loop Neighborhood’s Director of Fresh Food **Brandon Frampton** shared his experience across various regions, noting significant differences in how sensory experiences are approached, especially between the Southeast, East Coast, and West Coast. He points out that sensory

elements, including scent, are often used in various ways, such as the smell of coffee, and that some regions may be untapped in this regard. “We’ve tried everything... I don’t know or figured out the magic formula, but I agree, I think [sensory] is huge. Sometimes, it can even outpace visual,” he said.

Bonnie Zaring, executive director, food programs and offers for Race-Trac, agreed with Frampton on how geographies can offer different approaches to sensory and discussed how RaceTrac is working on integrating customer experience design within the limitations of convenience store space. “I think the approach around a whole store sensory experience is coming together more than it has in the past,” she said. She acknowledged the progress in focusing on visual merchandising but notes that sensory experiences like smell and ambiance are still being developed in the industry. She emphasized the need for a more unified approach across all elements.

Moving into the role of sensory within multiple brands, **Jasmine Struble**, senior category manager at Yesway, discussed her work in synergizing multiple brands and integrating foodservice with other store categories like private label and loyalty programs. She highlighted how Yesway has made burritos a key part of the experience and brand identity. This has led to a more cohesive customer experience and helps connect foodservice with other store offerings. “We integrate foodservice within promotions in the center store. We have fuel rewards. And so that’s kind of our deal and how we’re trying to bridge that gap and get that awareness beyond the hot food case. We’ve been doing a lot of packaged beverage and foodservice synergies, so you see more of our burrito presence in the doors,” she shared.



“ Nobody wants to walk in and smell chicken. More importantly, nobody wants to walk out and get in their car and smell like chicken.

Barbara Kessler, Senior Director, Food and Beverage, The Wills Group (Dash In)

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Overcoming Blind Spots in Customer Experience

Another fascinating part of the discussion addressed how food retailers, especially those deeply invested in their offer, can become “too close” to recognize issues that negatively impact customer experience. This topic stemmed from Roy Strasburger’s question to Toner about how smaller operators can “get outside of that bubble” and notice potential issues they may have become desensitized to such as an unpleasant odor, inefficient layout, or outdated design.

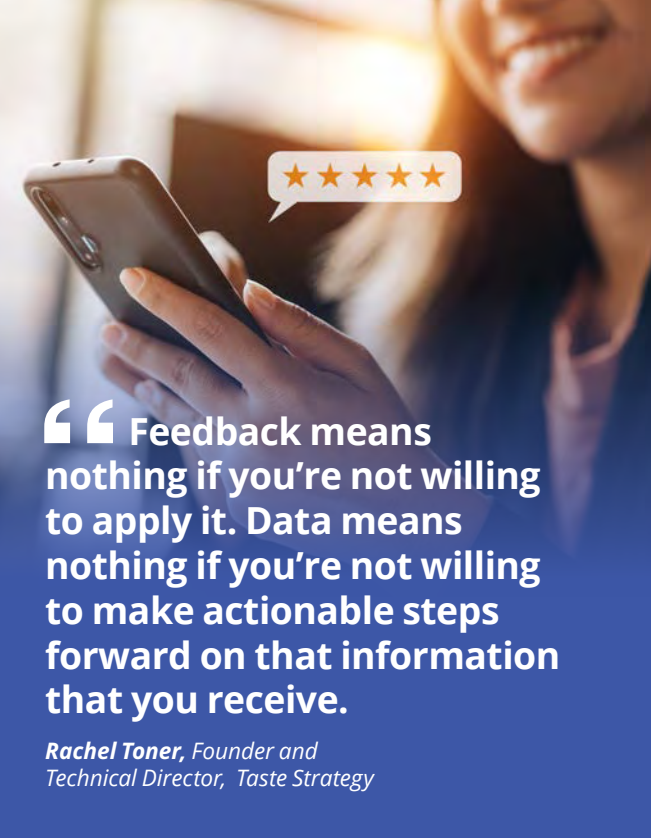
Kressner also emphasized that for small operators, “getting out of their bubble” is critical to improving awareness. She underscored that the challenge for these small operators is to identify the gaps in their store’s customer experience and create better sensory awareness.

Toner acknowledged that smaller retailers may struggle to recognize necessary improvements, especially if they lack resources. One solution is to build strong customer relationships and gather feedback through surveys, sharing an example from her time at Wawa where they used “Voice of the Customer” surveys, offering small

incentives to encourage participation. Another approach is hiring a third-party evaluator or benchmarking against other stores. However, she emphasizes that feedback is only useful if acted upon. “Feedback means nothing if you’re not willing to apply it. Data means nothing if you’re not willing to make actionable steps forward on that information that you receive,” she said.

Poye shared an example from Charlie Trotter’s fine dining restaurant, where interns and cooks were required to dine in the restaurant to better understand the customer experience. He suggests operators could benchmark best-in-class retailers and create a structured improvement plan. Toner built on this and created the Small Operator Sensory Guide included at the end of this report.

Eva Strasburger raised the topic of sensory experiences beyond smell, specifically the tactile experience customers have with food presentation. She used an example of poorly presented food, such as pizza falling off a plate or a soggy straw.

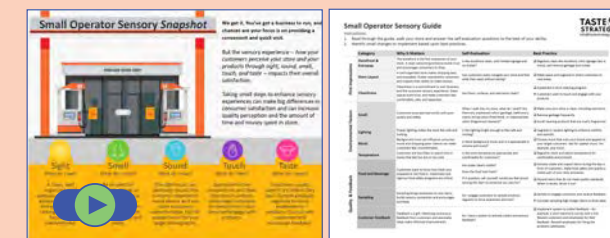


“Feedback means nothing if you’re not willing to apply it. Data means nothing if you’re not willing to make actionable steps forward on that information that you receive.”

Rachel Toner, Founder and Technical Director, Taste Strategy

Taste Strategy Small Operator Sensory Guide

is located at the end of this report and available for download on the [Vision Group Network website](#).



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Presentation

In the Future, Let's Chat About...

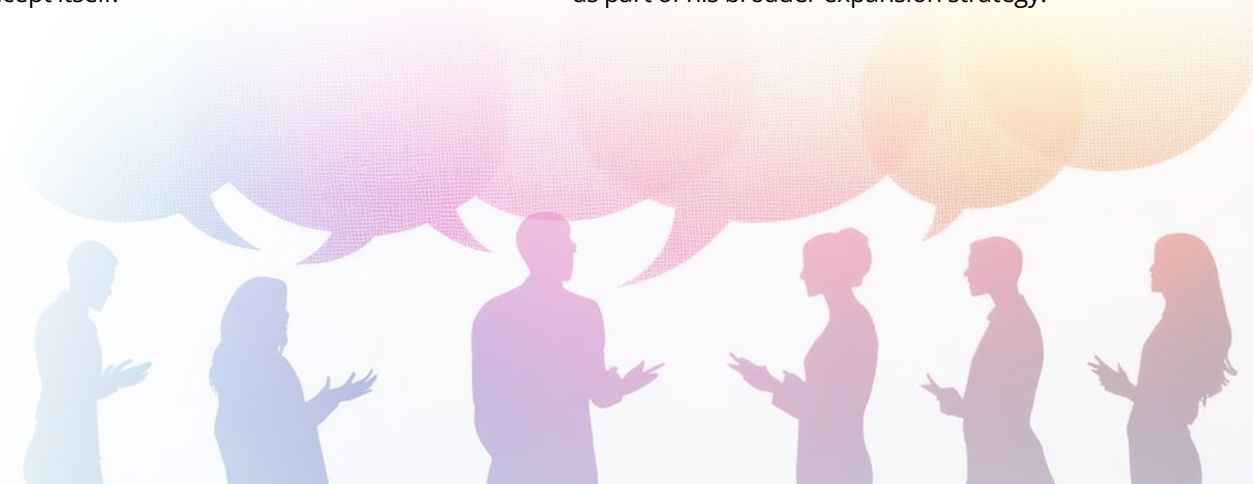
After their lively Q&A discussion, CFVG members brainstormed a range of relevant topics to explore in future meetings. Poye opened the conversation with a broad list of potential topics, aiming to spark discussion around relevant areas such as menu development, foodservice profitability, technology integration, customer experience, and consumer trends, among others. His goal was to ensure that the group's future meetings reflect their collective interests.

Kessler shared that her focus this year is on optimizing consistency across her restaurant chain. After rolling out a new menu, she intends to innovate in terms of processes, equipment, and training to ensure consistent, restaurant-quality execution across all locations.

She emphasized that her innovation efforts will not center on creating new menu items but rather on refining operational aspects, such as developing better procedures for kitchen workflows and improving staff training methods. Her ultimate aim is to scale efficiently without compromising quality, particularly as her company prepares for significant expansion.

Zaring expressed support for the topics Poye proposed and suggested that, in future meetings, there could be more opportunities for dialogue surrounding these topics, sharing solutions and insights. Struble echoed Zaring's sentiments and pointed out that the group's combined expertise would generate valuable discussions. She added a specific interest in improving the marketing and storytelling around dispensed beverages, particularly in the wake of emerging trends like "dirty sodas" (a non-alcoholic drink that's made by mixing soda with flavored syrups, fruit juices, and cream). Struble sees an opportunity to enhance the guest experience by rethinking how self-serve drink stations are presented, without needing to reinvent the concept itself.

Frampton outlined three main initiatives for Loop Neighborhood in the coming year. First, it is transitioning from employee-served to guest-served "hot-to-go" foods across 65 stores, a major shift that will require selecting appropriate equipment and redesigning operations to accommodate this change. The second focus is on redesigning packaging for better consistency and brand identity, as current packaging lacks variety and does not align with the company's evolving needs. Lastly, it is working on a cold coffee beverage program, testing it in 10 stores with the goal of capitalizing on the growing market for cold coffee drinks, aiming to compete with major chains like Starbucks. He is also developing two taco trucks as part of his broader expansion strategy.



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Final Reflection

The first meeting of CFVG highlighted the importance of considering all sensory elements, from taste, smell, visual, sound, and texture, even including sensory cues on the forecourt and parking lot, to enhance customer satisfaction, build brand identity, and drive business growth. Operators need to adopt a customer-centric approach by evaluating their store environments and products from a sensory perspective. By gathering direct feedback from customers and aligning sensory cues with customer expectations, retailers can identify what resonates with customers and refine their offerings accordingly.

Sensory branding must be holistic and cohesive. Every touchpoint in the customer journey, from digital marketing to the in-store experience, even before they walk in the store, contributes to the overall impression of a brand. This approach not only improves customer satisfaction but also fosters brand loyalty by creating memorable and consistent experiences. The practical aspects of implementing sensory strategies prove that even smaller retailers can adopt these tactics without breaking the bank.



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IN THEIR OWN WORDS

CFVG Members were asked to introduce themselves and share their foodservice stories at the beginning of the meeting.

Richard Poye, *Food Trends Think Tank*



On my first day in the convenience sector, I walked across a threshold of a store, and I thought, 'Why do people shop in convenience stores?'...It's because they're thirsty, they're hungry, they need indulgence or they need energy...It's those four core need states of a guest, consumer, customer. How we best serve them in this environment...and how we can advance and elevate that is really up to us.

Bonnie Zaring, *RaceTrac Inc*



[I] have a detailed understanding of what it takes to get food to the consumer, to get that great quality food to the guest and very passionate about the path of purchasing food, the right items, and really building an overall portfolio that continues to help us be successful in food. I think [foodservice] is really an interesting space in convenience retail. It's an exciting time for food and the emergence of how organizations are leaning into food and figuring out really where their strengths are and how to connect that to the guest.

Jon Cox, *McLane Company, Inc.*

We're all here because we feel like foodservice is the future of our industry, and we owe it to the industry to be able to give back to say we need to do quality food.



Roy Strasburger, *StrasGlobal, ComplianceSafe and Vision Group Network*

I don't believe necessarily that foodservice is the silver bullet for convenience retailing or retailing at all. But what I do believe is that foodservice is going to be the defining measure of convenience retailing going forward.



Jasmine Struble, *Yesway*



I love foodservice...It's so interesting because I didn't know if there was going to be any cross over, but what I can say is that there is novelty within retail...I'm from a company of storytelling, and so being able to extend that story now within retail is really great...I just love that food is perishable... It never gets old, and there's always something unique out there.

Eva Strasburger, *StrasGlobal, ComplianceSafe and Vision Group Network*

We're really excited you're here... We know we've got quite a few more members joining us, and we look forward to hearing what everybody has to say and reading the first [CFVG] Vision Report.



Barbara Kessler, *The Wills Group (Dash In)*

I've been [at The Wills Group] for seven years. I'm super passionate about foodservice. I live, eat, and breathe it. It's not just what I do, it's my hobby. [I'm] constantly working as most people will say in my life. But what's that saying about if you love what you do, you won't work a day in your life?



Mike Weber, *Upshop*



One of my first jobs was doing ethnography and market research in convenience stores for fixture manufacturers, and then I went into retail design. So I saw the value of good beverages at Ricker's and then I saw the good value of food at Parker's and everything in between.

Brandon Frampton, *Loop Neighborhood*

Texas Born was a lot of fun there as we built that up, did some cool things. And now currently I'm with Loop. I've been here eight months. I lead all of the food, dispensed bev, everything else, the field foodservice trainers, different things like that.



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NOTABLE AND QUOTABLE

“ Sensory isn't an elusive science, it's not a fake science. It's a real science and it's a science of measurement.

Rachel Toner, Founder and Technical Director, Taste Strategy

“ We're all here because we feel like foodservice is the future of our industry and we owe it to the industry to be able to do quality food.

Jon Cox, Vice President, Retail Foodservice, McLane Company, Inc.

“ I don't believe necessarily that foodservice is the silver bullet for convenience retailing or retailing at all. But what I do believe is that foodservice is going to be the defining measure of convenience retail going forward.

Roy Strasburger, CEO, StrasGlobal and Vision Group Network Co-Founder

“ It's an exciting time for food and the emergence of how organizations are leaning into food and figuring out where their strengths are and how to connect that to the guest.

Bonnie Zaring, Executive Director, Food Programs and Offers, RaceTrac

“ We want the visual that we're cooking, I call it display cooking, in the middle of the store.

Barbara Kessler, Senior Director, Food and Beverage, The Wills Group (Dash In)

“ So much of it in this conversation is really around food, but to me it's about the entire store experience and how do you bring other partners in other areas of the store, whether it's operations, marketing, other categories together to really think about sensory and how they could do it really well?

Richard Poye, Chief Operating Officer, Food Trends Think Tank

“ My folks back at the Mouse, they were like, "What are you doing, you're going to retail and convenience? What's an Allsup's?" And it's so interesting because I didn't know if there was going to be any cross-over, but what I can say is that there is novelty within retail.

Jasmine Struble, Senior Category Manager, Yesway

“ In my experience, the Southeast and the whole East Coast are far better, and then it starts to wander through the middle of the country. And out West, I think it's an untapped market. So it's shocking how food is an anomaly in convenience or drinks or anything else.

Brandon Frampton, Director of Fresh Food, Loop Neighborhood

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VALUABLE RESOURCES

The quantity of materials on this topic would make for an insurmountable pile. To help you navigate through the masses, here are resources worthy of making your must-read list.



Myra Kressner, Vision Group Network Co-Founder

This CFVG meeting discussed that all convenience retailers can and should understand how important sensory stimuli is for their customers—both positive and negative. Here are more examples of sensory marketing in various retail formats around the world from Kendu: [*Sensory Marketing: The Power of the 5 Senses in Retail.*](#)



Richard Poye, Food Trends Think Tank

Incorporating multi-sensory elements into space design is crucial for creating memorable and impactful experiences. By engaging multiple senses—sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste—designs can evoke deeper emotional responses and strengthen connections with users. For example, introducing fragrance into a space or using sound as a playful element, like piano stairs, can transform an ordinary environment into something more engaging. These sensory experiences enhance user satisfaction and create lasting impressions that stick with people, making them more likely to return or recommend the space. Ultimately, multi-sensory design enriches the user's interaction, making it more immersive and enjoyable.

This article in Medium, [*How Multi-Sensory Design Can Help You Create Memorable Experiences*](#), is a quick read but provides multiple examples of utilizing multi-sensory designing space.



Roy Strasburger, Vision Group Network Co-Founder

Sensory appeal has long been an important part of retail marketing. Who can ignore the smell of freshly baked cookies, meat on the grill, or fresh fish being fried? In our meeting, Rachel pinpoints the criteria of what makes a successful foodservice presentation. For my Valuable Resource, I took a slightly different approach. Sensory marketing is about more than just food. In this article, [*The role of sensory marketing and brand experience in building emotional attachment and brand loyalty in luxury retail stores*](#), from ResearchGate, the impact of sensory marketing in relation to luxury goods is explored. The article is a bit lengthy but (TLDR) research shows that successful sensory marketing can positively impact brand loyalty and customer satisfaction.

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Richard Poye
CFVG Facilitator/COO,
Food Trends Think Tank

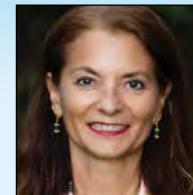


MEMBERS

VISION GROUP NETWORK CO-FOUNDERS



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Eva Strasburger
President, StrasGlobal;
CEO, Compliance Safe



Roy Strasburger
CEO, StrasGlobal;
President,
Compliance Safe



Richard Cashion
COO, Curby's Express Market



Jon Cox
President, Retail Foodservice,
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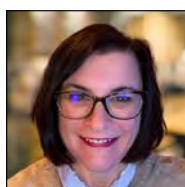
Brandon Frampton
Director of Fresh Food,
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Barbara Kessler
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Mike Weber
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Bonnie Zaring
Executive Director, Food
Programs and Offers,
RaceTrac Inc

CFVG Views

In The Room with CFVG

Presentation

IN THE ROOM WITH CFVG:

The Power of Sensory Science in Convenience Retail



Convenience Foodservice Vision Group (CFVG) invites you to join us **In The Room** to experience our meeting on January 23, 2025. We are providing you with the entire conversation so that you can be “in the room” with us, rather than simply reading polished sound bites.



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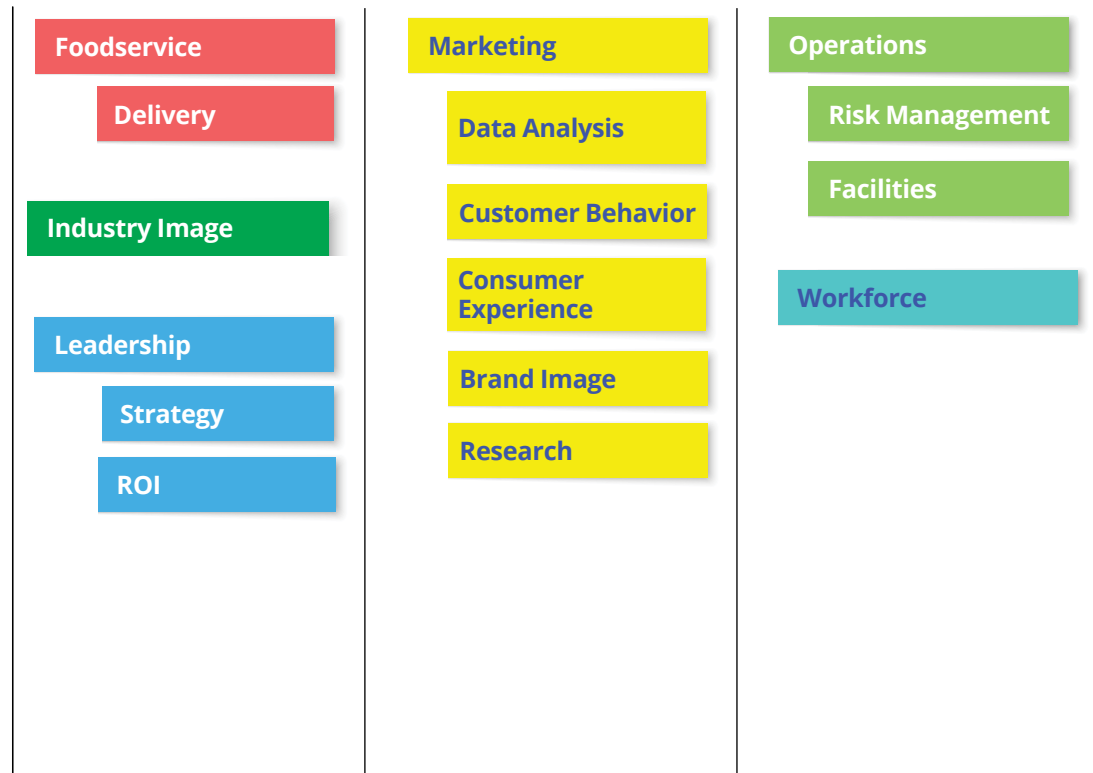
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Topic Reference Key

CFVG's mission is to increase the institutional knowledge of the retail industry by sharing ideas and perspectives. For your convenience, we have placed topic indicators throughout the dialogue. Below is a key to the list of topics.



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Myra Kressner

Welcome, Introductions, Meeting Rules

Hello, folks. My name is Myra Kressner. It's a pleasure to meet some folks that I may not have met before. On behalf of Eva Strasburger, Roy Strasburger, Richard Poye and myself, we are very pleased to welcome you all to the inaugural meeting of Convenience Foodservice Vision Group. CFVG has a very important new role in the Vision Group Network. We are extremely fortunate that Richard reached out to us about a year ago with his vision for elevating convenience foodservice and has been a catalyst for bringing Convenience Foodservice Vision Group to you and the industry. We thank you for committing your time and expertise to CFVG and know that each of you has given very serious consideration to your decision to become a member.

In that vein, we also deeply appreciate the Ally Supporter membership and thought leadership that we will receive from McLane Foodservice and Upshot

We're also very pleased that our guest subject matter expert, Rachel Toner with Taste Strategy, will be getting us started with a very thoughtful and stimulating discussion. As facilitator, Richard will take over this meeting in just a few minutes. But before that, I hope you will appreciate just a very short telling of Vision Group Network's story.

Eva, Roy and I started Vision Group Network about four years ago during COVID when everyone was looking for some sense of community. At that time, Eva and Roy's StrasGlobal business was managing dozens of stores around the country. And just a few months into the pandemic, they saw the need to create and share pandemic response tools for hundreds of c-store businesses that needed these tools and couldn't do it themselves. The reception was incredible and we began to see how to deliver an unmet need for real-time sharing and brainstorming to address disruption that the whole world was facing.

So that motivated the three of us to create The Vision Group made up of very smart people in convenience, grocery, foodservice retail, as well as academia. For two years, we met virtually for two hours every other month and it was a much needed opportunity to share and discuss the range of disruption that was exploding in our industry. The original The Vision Group still meets but not as frequently. The sharing and learning and true sense of community that we created among TVG's very engaged members opened the door late in 2022 to create a virtual sharing community for convenience channel CEOs via Convenience Leaders Vision Group, with the added dimension of publishing and distributing Vision Reports. What makes the Vision Reports unique is that in addition to a summary of the meeting, we publish an actual transcript called In The Room, accompanied by the full presentation from our subject matter experts that includes their slides.

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Roy Strasburger



Eva Strasburger

Myra Kressner

Eva, Roy and I have self-funded these first two Vision Groups and then early in 2023, we formed Convenience Technology Vision Group with retailers and also Ally Supporter members that have become incredibly engaged, and CTVG now enters its third year.

We started Conexus Vision Group late last year in conjunction with Conexus, NACS' Technology Standards Group. If you've not already heard or read, CxVG's goal is to engage C-suite management and owners together with solution providers in providing innovation and in prioritizing innovation for their company that their customers and their employees can get excited about.

Meeting another very timely need, Electric Vehicles Vision Group launched late last year with a broad range of stakeholders in the mobility and EV ecosystem made up of convenience and retail fuel, hospitality, foodservice, municipalities and more. That Vision Report just dropped this week and on March 6th, our very first Global Convenience Vision Group virtual meeting takes place with about a dozen CEOs from several countries in the EU as well as U.K., Argentina, South Africa and Australia.

The idea behind all of these groups is to bring the best minds in the industry together for their perspective on problems, challenges, and opportunities. Our goal is not conformity, rather problem solving and forward-thinking as you've heard from your conversations with Richard. And that's why we make all these Vision Group discussions accessible to everyone for free through our acclaimed Vision Reports, podcasts and a new VGN newsletter and YouTube channel being developed. The ultimate goal is summed up by our mission statement, which is *Sharing Today to Shape Tomorrow*.

So I'm just about done. Two brief points before I introduce Richard. The antitrust slide on the screen [Publication & Antitrust Statement Shown on Screen] reminds every one of the antitrust rules that everyone has agreed to in your membership form and that this meeting is being recorded for publication and will be distributed broadly in the Vision Reports. Richard will remind everyone during his intro about the opportunity to make off-the-record comments. Roy and Eva, anything to add?

No, I just want to say thank you and welcome to everybody. This is our inaugural Foodservice Vision Group and we're looking forward to hearing more from you and seeing where this goes. Thank you very much to Richard for facilitating this and helping pull this group together.

Yes, thank you.

Good. Well, thank you for the opportunity to tell our Vision Group Network story so I'm passing the torch to you, Richard.

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Richard Poye

All right, thanks. That's good. Thank you everybody. Thanks Myra, Eva, and Roy for working with me on this and helping bring this together. I think one of the observations we had was that there's not really a consistent share group within the convenience sector that takes the information from that group and publicizes it and shares it across and helps to try to lift the entire convenience sector. So, part of bringing this group together is first to generate a think tank, a share group that we get to know each other better and share our experiences and help broaden our understanding of foodservice. But it's also helping the overall industry, elevating the industry and also the perception of convenience foodservice. So, when you think about what we're trying to do here as we focus on bringing this group together, we'll be having a range of speakers, a range of topics every quarter. And what I love about the tight-knit group that makes up Convenience Foodservice Vision Group is that we're going to get to know each other better.

There are opportunities outside of meetings for the group to get to know each other better. You'll be able to see different perspectives on how you each approach an issue and get to know each other, like I said, and broaden your understanding. So general housekeeping rules as we go into this meeting. I would really like it if people could have their cameras on. First of all, many of us haven't had a chance to get to know each other and having cameras on is always a really good way to do it. I understand if you're sick then go ahead and keep your camera off. But I think it really helps everybody get a chance to get to know each other. So that would be greatly appreciated.

Also, during the presentation if you can have your laptop on mute, that would be ideal. But then when we get into the conversations, definitely take the mute off so that we're able to have more engaging conversations throughout. Also, the chat. The chat is really for us to take information. If someone has a really interesting link or site that we want to share, put that into the chat. But we really don't want to have a conversation offline in the chat because like we've said, the meeting is being recorded and it's hard to capture the conversation if we have a separate conversation going on in the chat. And by all means, really what this group is about is having far more engaging feedback and those types of things.

And as we go into this, if you have a question, ask it. Let's make sure that we have a good balance of sharing our conversations in our time with each other. If someone does get a little bit lengthy, there may be an opportunity to engage and move on to the next person. We want everybody to be engaged and so if you haven't talked, definitely get involved. We will get you involved in that process. And finally, a good way for all of us to get to know each other better is to have a short introduction; just who you are, it doesn't have to be lengthy. And then share something interesting about foodservice convenience that's maybe an aha to somebody else within the group. So, for myself, my name is Richard Poye, the founder of Food Trends Think Tank.

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I really look at my career as three separate pillars. I started my career as a chef in fine dining restaurants and luxury hotels. So, I really think about the mindset of the person in the kitchen preparing the food and how that food is put together and how it's served. Then I moved into the CPG world, the Consumer Products Group. I worked with Unilever for 13 years and in that context, I really understood and learned about product development, innovation funnels, bringing products to market and packaged goods products. And engaging with scientists, technologists, supply chain, packaging, marketing to bring a product to market. And I really thought about the home cook in that phase. For the past 13 years I've been in retail. And this is really to me probably one of the most challenging of all three because of the smaller footprint that we're dealing with, the speed in which we need to deliver the food, the skill of the individual working in the store and those types of things.

I really want us to share our experiences and those types of things and learn about each other's backgrounds. My aha moment really came on my first day in the convenience sector. I walked across a threshold of a store, and I thought, **"Why do people shop in convenience stores?"** And it's really in my mind, and I've said this and the people that know me have heard me say this, it's because they're thirsty, they're hungry, they need indulgence, or they need energy. There are some other things also. But really, it's those four core needs states of a guest, consumer, customer. And how we best serve them in this environment is really up to us and how we can advance and elevate that is really up to us. I look forward to the conversation and thanks for joining us today. I'm going to go next to Eva or Roy if you would like to introduce yourself in this process.

Okay. Good afternoon, everyone. My name's Roy Strasburger. I am one of the founders of VGN and also the CEO of a company called StrasGlobal. My family and I have been in the convenience store industry for three generations, running stores mainly in Texas. We sold our company operations to 7-Eleven back in 2012 and then we were doing company management for other people. We ultimately operated about 6,000 units in 33 countries. Eva and I have gotten out of the direct retail base business as of about a year and a half ago and have been focusing our time on VGN.

But the key thing, the key "aha" moment for me, is I don't believe necessarily that foodservice is the silver bullet for convenience retailing or retailing at all. But what I do believe is that **foodservice is going to be the defining measure of convenience retailing going forward.**

If you do not have a good foodservice program that's professional, that's well run and that's inviting to your customer; you're not going to survive in the business. And that is how the competitive aspect is going to be focused: **people are going to be looking for offers, such as foodservice**, that create the sensation of the store being a destination as opposed to an impulse sale - as you currently have in convenience stores.

Customer Behavior

Roy Strasburger

Foodservice

Customer Behavior

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I think this is incredibly important for the future of convenience or, what we are also calling in Europe, roadside retailing. So, thank you very much for being involved. Eva?

Eva Strasburger

The only thing I'd like to add is do you want to mention something about Compliance Safe?

Roy Strasburger

Eva is the CEO of a software company called Compliance Safe. We created Compliance Safe when we were operating our own convenience stores because we were having problems keeping up with our permits and licenses. And it would always seem that we would be getting an inspector on the Friday before a three-day weekend and if we didn't have the proper documentation, we would get closed down. Or if something happened like a disgruntled employee or a fire, we could lose our documentation. So, what we've created is a software system that's cloud-based where you can store and manage all of your time-sensitive documents such as permits and licenses. And it will remind you when they need to be renewed, keep copies of them in the cloud so anybody who has authority can access them, and they can be shared with whoever the owner thinks they need to be shared with. Eva is CEO of that company, which has a lot of applications to obviously foodservice, food permits, food handling permits, and items like that. Eva?

Eva Strasburger

So anyway, welcome everybody. We're really excited you're here. This is the inaugural meeting, and we know we've got quite a few more members joining us and we look forward to hearing what everybody has to say and reading the first Vision Report.

Richard Poye

Thank you, Eva, Roy. I'm going to switch over to our Ally Supporter members here. Jon Cox and I have known each other for a few years and when putting together this group, I thought who would be a good Ally Supporter in this context, and I think that the combination of Jon's experience being in foodservice convenience and now with McLane gives him both perspective as an operator and category management, but then also in distribution. So, Jon, thank you for joining and it's a chance to talk to the team.



Jon Cox

Thanks, Richard. So just a little bit about me. I've been at McLane now for two years next month. Its very interesting to come from the retail sector where I had spent 25 years. I don't want to date myself, I started when I was 10. But I think just interesting to be on the distributor supplier side and I think if I could go back, I probably wouldn't yell at my logistics team as much as I probably did. But most of my experience is in big box. So I started at HEB (HE Butt grocery chain) mostly in fresh food, produce, meat, deli. Ahold USA for those of you on the East Coast and then was with Giant Eagle for 12 years before I came to McLane. My first five years at the [Giant Eagle] supermarket and then the last seven years running the GetGo cafe market convenience store. Chief Merchant Supply Chain Officer was over marketing and also over new building design. So when Richard came to me with the opportunity to be an Ally Supporter, I really thought about just being able to give back to the industry. One of the things I love

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Richard Poye



Mike Weber

about this industry is we share; we try to win together. And so, I think if we can utilize this group and this platform to say that we're all friends here and because the enemy is the QSR across the street and how do we all win together, whether you're a retailer, whether you're a distributor. It doesn't matter what role you play in the industry. We're all here because we feel like **foodservice is the future of our industry** and we owe it to the industry to be able to give back to say we need to do quality food.

I'd be remiss if I didn't say quality beverage, with my friend Rachel on the call. But **quality food, quality beverage. And we have an opportunity to steal share.** So if I can help in any way, just be a part of that and give back, there are tons of people who helped me be successful at GetGo as I was learning the convenience business and so I really just want to be able to pay it back and pay it forward. So just a little bit about me but thanks, Richard, for giving me a few minutes to talk to the group.

Thank you, Jon. And Mike Weber from Upshop. Mike and I had our first conversation last spring. Patrick, on his team pulled this together and I just thought that Upshop was doing a lot of really interesting things; AI-driven solutions around forecasting and ordering and just really elevating the opportunities within foodservice. So, when I found out just recently that Upshop was going to be joining and being part of this, I thought that just made it really an ideal link because it's balancing the food and technology component, which I think is really imperative as we move forward. So, Mike, welcome and thanks for being here today.

Yes, I really appreciate it, Richard. I don't have as much to say as Jon. I am excited though personally because one of my first jobs was doing ethnography and market research in convenience stores for fixture manufacturers - I don't know if anybody knows Cannon Equipment. Then I went into retail design so I saw the value of good beverages at Ricker's and then I saw the good value of food at Parker's and everything in between. My first three years I was probably in every major Speedway, RaceTrac, every major c-store chain trying to figure out what I was going to do with my life, talking to people. So that was an incredible motivator to get into marketing and so I'm really excited to be here. I represent marketing and growth for Upshop in the new categories. We have store operation software for food retail, roll up of a lot of great software that we've taken into the cloud with a single platform.

We're really excited about the c-store. Upshop is building a pretty comprehensive product that we're really excited about for foodservice in general. We are totally ready and prepared and excited about serving the industry. We've got a lot of experts that are at my disposal or at our business disposal. So, this is just great insight because there's still a ton to do from a product standpoint and we're really excited about how we can stay close to leaders in the industry to drive those decisions.

Richard Poye

Fantastic. I'm just basically going to go down the list that's on my screen, so may not be the list that you're seeing but I'm going to start with Barbara. Barbara, if you could just introduce yourself to the group and again, thank you for coming and I am interested in hearing what you have to say.



Barbara Kessler

Hi, everybody. I am Barbara Kessler, I am the senior director for category management and price book for The Wills Group. We operate out of the Washington D.C., Baltimore area. It's where headquarters are. We have 60 branded stores that are branded Dash In operating today in Delaware, Virginia, and Maryland and we're about to expand into North Carolina. I've been in the industry for quite some time. I came over from the restaurant industry and worked for Valero, which is where I came into the convenience store side of the world. I am from San Antonio, Texas, so Valero was my hometown.

And then from there I've made my way around the country going from Kroger to Thorntons to ampm out on the West Coast and now I'm here. So, I've been here for seven years. I'm super passionate about foodservice. I live, eat, and breathe it. It's not just what I do, it's my hobby. So constantly working, as most people will say in my life. But what's that saying about if you love what you do, you won't work a day in your life? So, there you go, that's me in a nutshell. I look forward to being in this group and I'm excited to hear what everyone has to say.

Richard Poye

Fantastic. Thanks, Barbara. I'm going to be up in the DC area in a few weeks so maybe we can meet in a store. I'll send you notes separately.

Barbara Kessler

Definitely. Definitely.

Richard Poye

Hey, Bonnie. Welcome to the group.



Bonnie Zaring

Thank you. Thanks, Richard. My name's Bonnie Zaring and I'm with RaceTrac. I am the executive director of our foodservice categories, and I have our culinary innovation team as well. And I've been in convenience retail for four years but that's not the beginning of my food time. Prior to that I was with a big box retailer. I was with Walmart for 14 years and did a few things, but my last role was in foodservice - food operations across bakery and produce, deli, cafe areas and all of the food side of the business. So I have a detailed understanding of what it takes to get food to the consumer, to get that great quality food to the guest and very passionate about the path of purchasing food, the right items, and really building an overall portfolio that continues to help us be successful in food.

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Richard Poye

Brandon Frampton

Richard, you said share an aha moment and I guess one of mine would be the transition across retail –going from a larger environment and more of a grocery and then spending time in convenience retail and finding the common threads between the two but the differences, as well. And I think it's really an interesting space in convenience retail. It's an exciting time for food and the emergence of how organizations are leaning into food and figuring out really where their strengths are and how to connect that to the guest. So I'm excited to be here with the group and really look forward to what we're able to share and do together.

Thank you, Bonnie. That's awesome. Hey, Brandon. See that you're here, welcome to the meeting. Maybe if you could go ahead and do a quick introduction and maybe give your aha moment, something about foodservice would be great.

Okay, outstanding. I grew up at Pilot Travel Centers, so when I started there, we had 60 stores. Now they're a very big company. It was a lot of fun because we didn't know what we were doing. They didn't have any idea what they were doing for food, so we got to build out pretty cool things. After that, I went to a company I'm sure a lot of you are familiar with, Kangaroo (The Pantry), and ran their foodservice. Made a quick stop, maybe not that quick, at CST. CST was a lot of fun while it lasted, and then I went to Texas Born. Texas Born was a lot of fun there as we built that up, did some cool things. And now currently I'm with Loop. We've got 140 locations out on the West Coast, all in California. We really have the Bay Area locked in. We've got 140 stores, like I said, we've got a really big appetite. That number will be over 150 and zoom through 170.

So, with that being said, I lead all of the food, dispensed bev, everything else, the field foodservice trainers, different things like that. So, we've got a pretty good team. And what we're doing, what we're faced with here is we haven't put a big focus – I've been here eight months – on food. They've been great retailers, great at car wash, stores are clean. And then they decided about a year ago they're going to go all in on food. So, I moved here from Atlanta and then we built up a team.

So, my aha moment in food – maybe I'll have to come back to that, but I've got a lot of them. Maybe share a few of those over some cold beers but I don't know. I've lived and breathed it since my 16th birthday. A lot of work with QSR groups, with Wendy's and different things, and then also proprietary, so there you go. Thanks.

Great, thanks Brandon. Jasmine, you're up next.



Richard Poye

Jasmine Struble

Hi, this is Jasmine Struble, senior category manager for foodservice for BW Gas and Convenience. We operate under the Allsup's and Yesway banners. We span across nine states, primarily in Texas and New Mexico over the Allsup's banner. So, I'm a mom and I'm a professional and all of the above, but I have been within the retail world now with Yesway and Allsup's for the last four years under Derek Gaskins, a phenomenal leader. If you've met him before, you know what I'm talking about.

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And previously, more so on the parks resorts, QSR, FSR (Fast Serve Restaurant), I worked with the Walt Disney Company based in Orlando, supporting Walt Disney World, Disneyland Cruise Line, and also assisted in some overseas support for Shanghai, Hong Kong and Paris.

But I love foodservice. I can relate with several of the folks that were speaking prior. I think one of the things, my folks back at the Mouse, they were like, “What are you doing, you’re going to retail and convenience? What’s an Allsup’s?” And it’s so interesting because I didn’t know if there was going to be any crossover, but what I can say is that there is novelty within retail. And if you’ve ever been to one of our stores out in West Texas or New Mexico, we somewhat have a cult following for the burrito, and that’s exciting for me. I’m from a company of storytelling, and so being able to extend that story now within retail is really great. So, we were able to highlight the 50th anniversary of the burrito last year.

And I just love that food is perishable, right? So, it never gets old and there’s always something unique out there. Love going to the shows. And Richard, you mentioned that you’re a chef by trade and definitely I miss working with chefs on a daily basis, because you guys are the unique ones. You’re the ones that are the artists, right? And so now I get to be somewhat of the creative where I’m at now, so I attribute that to my experience and partnerships with the chefs back at Disney.

So, I’m really excited to be a part of this group and happy to link up with anybody in the future with any ideation.

Richard Poye

That’s awesome, Jasmine. Thanks for being here today. Looking forward to getting to know you better. And I’ve been in west Texas a lot, so the burrito is definitely a thing. I’m getting ready now to pivot on over to the presentation portion of it.

Our presenter today is Rachel Toner. She’s a founder and technical director of Taste Strategy. We’re going to be talking about sensory science today, or just our senses in general, and the opportunity that we have in really elevating our understanding of that and the impact that that could have on not just on ourselves and our own brands, but the industry as a whole. It’s an underutilized area of science that we could apply within our business.

And I think also as you start off a new group like this, you have to pick an area that maybe everybody else isn’t talking about. And so as she delves into this today, it is something that we typically don’t talk about, but it’s something that we all experience and I think it’s a great opportunity to explore a new area and get to understand it better and see how we can implement certain practices and processes into how we develop food and how we elevate the overall guest experience. So, I’m going to hand it off to Rachel and I’m looking forward to a great presentation.

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Rachel Toner

The Presentation

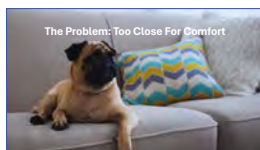
Great. Thank you so much Richard. And before I pull up the presentation here, I'd like to thank the Vision Group Network and the team, Myra, Roy, Eva, Karen, and Ang and Richard for getting me set up here. And it's such a privilege to be able to be the speaker for the inaugural meeting. So, I appreciate it so much, and even though we're competitive and we do things to benefit our own business, it's so important to come together and talk about initiatives and ideas that we can all work on together to bring back to our businesses to drive strategy. So, I'm really excited. Let me pull up my slides.

Okay, so Richard gave me a really nice introduction. My name is Rachel Toner and I am the founder and technical director of Taste Strategy. My business helps make other businesses make things that taste better, smell better, look better, sound better, and feel better by **understanding the sensory in consumer experiences to deliver business results**. And for the better part of 12 years, I've really, I want to say obsessed over the consumer sensory experience and how to leverage the senses to delight consumers. I have a research-based master's degree in food science from Penn State, and I spent three years in consumer-packaged goods on the research and development team. And most recently, spent the past seven years on Wawa's product innovation team, leading sensory strategies for foodservice and also developing specialty beverage and fresh food concepts.

And that was just such an amazing time there and really got my feet wet with regards to convenience. And I think that was my aha moment. Working there, I realized that there was so much more that we could be doing from a sensory perspective, and it really drove me to start my business to be able to share this amazing science.

The goal of this presentation is to show you the **impact that sensory science can have on consumers** and business outcomes along with approaches that you can apply to your own business. Foodservice and convenience is always a hot topic, and we're always talking about this blurring of lines between convenience and QSR. But quite frankly, convenience is far behind QSR, consumer packaged goods and other industries when it comes to delivering and applying sensory to drive innovation.

As we think about making the consumer the heart of our business, let me start by asking you this, and this is a theoretical question. But when was the last time that you or I were able to honestly and truthfully walk into our stores as a consumer would, with fresh eyes? And I honestly would say that that's impossible. We can't.

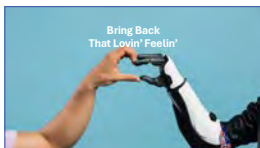


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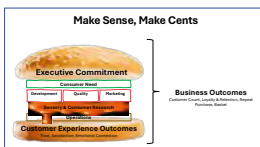
Research



Strategy



Research



Data Analysis

A really good example of this is an example from Procter & Gamble. They famously had a similar insight when they developed and launched their nose blind campaign for their product, Febreze. You may remember this. And Febreze is a product that eliminates odors. So, what they found was that people adapted to and were no longer aware of the bad smells, like a stinky dog, in their environments, and those sensory experiences offended their guests. So, someone would come into the home and be like, "Oh my God, I smell stinky dog," and the homeowner would be like, "I don't know what you're talking about." So, they found this insight.

And in the same way we have to ask ourselves, are we too close? Are we too adapted? Are we too used to our retail environments that we are unable to identify what stinks about our own business? We adapt to our surroundings. But when your consumers come into your store, they experience every single scent, sound and sight. So we have to ask them, **we have to measure the experiences in order to understand.**

And today there's so much focus on technology and efficiency and the user experience on digital. Rightfully so. It helps us so much. But the human touch and this ability to connect with our consumers and empathize with them is critical to remaining consumer-focused businesses. And one of the pieces that is often missing from this equation is an **investment in sensory science** to understand how things are perceived by the customer through the senses, touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing. Are we literally out of touch with our consumers?

And one of the things I get a lot is... you get this from get from all industries, academics, retail environments, CPG. It's like, "Hey, Rach. Sensory is not a real science." And I'm here to break this myth. Sensory isn't an elusive science, it's not a fake science. It's a real science and it's a **science of measurement**. Like we would use a thermometer, for example, to measure temperature. Sensory scientists use people to measure responses as experienced by the consumer. So in all, we have the power to shape these consumer experiences and how consumers perceive products and your brand. And so, we also have this very important responsibility to measure and understand them. And sensory science produces real actionable data that can inform business decisions.

And from a business perspective, we know that there is not one singular factor that produces business success. I know everybody's looking for the hack or the trick, but there's not one singular factor. We're going to use the burger imagery throughout the presentation, so you'll have to bear with me here, but it's like a burger.

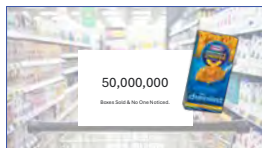
It's the combination of the quality of the ingredients that make it great, but **sensory and consumer feedback** can be that secret sauce that can provide the **data to inform how to improve the customer experience** or how to outperform the competition, which results in better business outcomes.

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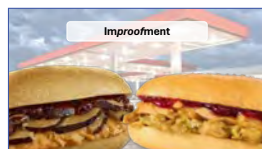
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Presentation

Strategy



Research



Data Analysis

ROI

Risk Management

What's important to note here is that absolutely none of this can happen without an **executive commitment to quality** in the customer experience. That's so important. We need their support in able to do this. And I could sit here all day and talk about sensory and the power of sensory but let me take you through some examples to show you the impact that sensory can have.

If you've ever thought about this, have you ever wanted to make a product change without anyone noticing? Maybe it's a sourcing issue, maybe it's a government mandate like removing red number three, or maybe it's something else. But sensory can help you make changes without anyone noticing. In 2016, Kraft removed all artificial flavors, colors et cetera, from their Mac and Cheese. And this took them three full years of research and development before they rolled this out. They rolled this out quietly and they sold 50 million boxes before highlighting that no one noticed. A spokesperson for Kraft actually did an interview and he expressed how confident they felt rolling this out because they knew that it tasted exactly the same.

And you have to wonder, how can you know that? And you know because of **sensory research**. Sensory research informed the decision-making here. And then to show the impact here, the brilliant marketing team then took this and made a huge campaign around it. So, it just shows you the impact that sensory can have in product development. And then also bridging into marketing campaigns.

Another QSR example, this is an example of a substantiated sensory claim. So, Wendy's launched their new fries and really wanted to come out swinging. They made a preference claim here, almost two to one over McDonald's. So how do you make a claim like that, right? You need sensory data to substantiate those types of claims. You don't want to go to court and get sued because you made a taste claim and don't have the data to support it. I think this is a great example of the fact that when you make claims like this, taste needs data to back it up.

The third example is something that's near and dear to me, and an example of how sensory can **provide data to support business decisions** and business cases for product changes. This was a product that I worked on, it's a turkey sandwich. And the objective here was to improve the quality of the turkey protein source. So, the old on the left, the new on the right. And as you may know, oftentimes along with quality comes a potential cost increase. So, to substantiate any of these incremental costs, we needed to be able to show the business that our prototypes were indeed a taste improvement. And then furthermore, we had to take that product, test it in stores to be able to validate the fact that the sales would **cover any type of incremental cost** to the business.

So, sensory can be used as a tool in **risk assessment** and in decision-making. And this is obviously a success story, but there were many products that I worked on that didn't make it to market. In other industries too, many products don't make it to

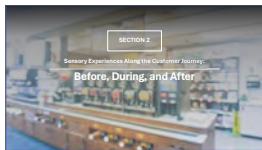
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Presentation



Strategy



Consumer Experience



Facilities

market for sensory-related reasons or other business reasons. You could have something that doesn't make it because of cost, right? It tastes great, but we won't make money. Shelf life, it tastes great, but it doesn't hold. Time and complexity taste great, but it's too difficult to make at store, and that negatively impacts execution, which then negatively impacts product and consumer expectations. So these are just a very few examples of how sensory can inform decisions.

And I mentioned earlier that convenience is far behind other industries when it comes to sensory investment. This is the short list. There are some really big players here in CPG and in quick service restaurants, but if you don't have the resources, or you're not large enough to do your own product development or have your own product development team, or have a sensory team or resources, then you can certainly **rely on your suppliers**. There are some suppliers on this list. Even some startups, right? The suppliers can help you in product development and with your sensory capabilities. And if they don't have them, we should really be having these discussions to push them to have them, to help support convenience retail.

Okay, so I've got you thinking about the sensory experience and how sensory approaches can be applied. But now I would like to segue into discussing the sensory experience as part of the customer journey. And what's important to note is that the sensory experience starts far before customers even enter your store.

Businesses spend a ton of time and energy, resources, getting people to buy things, which makes sense, we're businesses. But this is all about setting expectations and bringing awareness and attracting customers. And even though you might not think about it, whether through digital or other means, you're making brand promises to your customers that they expect you to keep. And if you show them a burger like this, you better be ready to deliver on it.

Retailers often overlook the role that **sensory experiences, especially visual experiences**, play in setting up proper expectations for consumers and influencing consumer behavior.

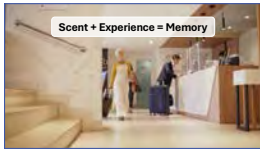
So, you've enticed them. They finally get to your location, and this might sound cliché, but first impressions are everything. **Lighting, scent, cleanliness**. This creates this immediate perception about the safety and the quality of our environment and, transparently, if consumers really want to eat there. So, let's talk about a few examples of ways that sensory and retail environment can impact the customer experience.

So, when someone arrives at your store, what aromas are they greeted with? Is it coffee? Is it fried chicken? Is it cleaner? Is it fuel? You don't want your consumers to think that you've gone nose blind, right? The importance here is that sense paired with

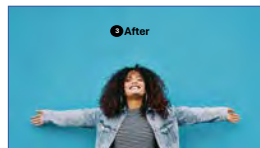
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Presentation



Consumer Experience



Mind the Gap		
Expectation	Reality	Assessment
		Product Problem
		Quality Problem
		Expectations Problem
		✓



experiences create lasting memories. And in fact, research shows that **scent and smell, above all of the other senses, evoke the strongest memories** because of their connections to parts of the brain that are responsible for emotion, for associations and for memory.

And this can be a really good thing, and it can also be a really bad thing. Some companies actually use scent to their advantage to purposefully create sensory-related experiences. Marriott, for example, has this pleasant signature scent called Attune, which ironically means to become aware. I don't know if you're becoming aware that you're in a Marriott property. But they diffuse that all around their lobby, in their cosmetics, and it's to create these memories and these connections with their travelers. And by no means am I saying start diffusing scent in your store, but I think the purpose here is that you want to create a pleasant experience for your customer. So, make sure the scent in your store is appropriate and it's neutral or pleasant.

Another thing we tend to overlook in our retail environment is **how customers interact with our equipment** and how that impacts the quality perception of products. I think the Bean to Cup machine is a really good example of this because it involves all of the senses. You have to touch the screen. You hear the beans grinding, right? They see and smell the freshly brewed coffee. And this is actively setting up cues like freshness and expectations about the way the product will taste. So, if we think about other ways that consumers engage with equipment and products in your store, we think about the way that those are delivering and setting expectations for customers.

So, let's move quickly to the after. And this is the third part of the abbreviated customer journey. This is where consumers take the time to enjoy the product that they purchased, judge you, and I guess assess their life decisions, right? Was it worth it or not?

And one thing that they're going to be assessing is whether or not what they purchased met their expectations? And this is what I call the **expectation versus reality gap**. There are thousands of memes that can give you insight here, but ideally, we would want the bottom row. We would want to have a high-quality promise with high quality delivery, but sometimes we get the top row where a business has overpromised and under-delivered. That's what the consumer might call false advertising. Or we might get the second row where we delivered, but the expectations were already low. So that's really a quality issue. And then the third row. You expected something that wasn't of high quality, and you received something that was much better than you expected.

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Presentation

Consumer Experience



Strategy

Commitment to Foodservice, Not Size of Chain			
Factor	Foundational	Intermediate	Advanced
Menu	Menu is clear and easy to understand	Menu is clear and easy to understand, with some items that are hard to find	Menu is clear and easy to understand, with items that are hard to find and some items that are hard to find
Service	Service is fast and efficient	Service is fast and efficient, with some items that are hard to find	Service is fast and efficient, with items that are hard to find and some items that are hard to find
Environment	Environment is clean and comfortable	Environment is clean and comfortable, with some items that are hard to find	Environment is clean and comfortable, with items that are hard to find and some items that are hard to find
Staff	Staff is friendly and helpful	Staff is friendly and helpful, with some items that are hard to find	Staff is friendly and helpful, with items that are hard to find and some items that are hard to find
Price	Price is fair and reasonable	Price is fair and reasonable, with some items that are hard to find	Price is fair and reasonable, with items that are hard to find and some items that are hard to find
Location	Location is convenient and accessible	Location is convenient and accessible, with some items that are hard to find	Location is convenient and accessible, with items that are hard to find and some items that are hard to find
Marketing	Marketing is clear and easy to understand	Marketing is clear and easy to understand, with some items that are hard to find	Marketing is clear and easy to understand, with items that are hard to find and some items that are hard to find



Strategy

And I want to pause here for a moment, because you might think that this is great on the surface, but it's actually a sign of other concerns like brand or industry image. And this is something that I encountered a lot in my work. We would do research, and consumers would say that this product was better than expected. What this shows us is that, what we concluded from some of that work, was that consumers' expectations of foodservice in the industry were low. So the key takeaway here is that we're all responsible for working on and **changing the narrative around what consumers can expect from convenience**, so we don't have such a big gap between expectations and reality. We want them to expect something excellent and we want to deliver on something excellent.

And then a quick note, what you deliver today is going to impact future purchasing decisions and expectations about what you will deliver in the rest of your offer. So it's just important to remember that any type of changes you make today, you want to make some of these incremental quality changes because it will pay dividends as consumers interact with your brand and help form those expectations.

So finally, regardless of your size, there are actions you can take to **implement sensory strategies** to improve your business. And I spent a lot of time thinking about categorizing approaches based upon chain size. But as I attempted to do that, I concluded that applying sensory approaches wasn't dictated by the size of the chain, has nothing to do with your size. There are some really small chains that have excellent foodservice programs. So, it's **applying the right sensory strategies based upon a business's commitment to foodservice**.

So, I want to share some of those approaches with you. There's a lot here, so this is just a guide for discussion, and really many retailers are probably at various levels on some of the specified factors here. But for brevity, let's focus on some of the sensory recommendations I may make for a business that is at a foundational level. And this might be a retailer that offers pre-packaged or prepared foods and just wants to get started in applying sensory approaches to their business.

A couple of easy things that you can do in order to start thinking about sensory and applying that to your business to improve would be **incorporating sensory into your audits**, including smell. You could include something like intensity, pleasantness, even maybe a check all that apply with regards to descriptors to better understand the environment and make those changes. You could also add some questions around sound and appearance. And then the second recommendation I might make for someone at a foundational level would be **working very closely, again with your suppliers**, understand their processes to make sure that they are offering you and providing you with products that deliver in customer expectations.

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Research



Foodservice

I mean, at the end of the day, if we want to be at QSR level with regards to quality, if we want to change expectations of foodservice and convenience, there needs to be this top-down **support for sensory and consumer research** to drive competition, to support culinary professionals and product development teams and to help us continuously deliver great experiences that, frankly, our customers deserve. They deserve it. We can't be guessing about the way things taste based upon singular opinions and guessing about how our retail environment is being perceived by the customers. We need data to substantiate some of these decisions.

So, to wrap it up, I'd like to bring attention to the call to action again. And really, I feel so passionately about this and sensory is such an underutilized resource and I know that together, that using these resources we can transform what consumers expect from convenience. It's our duty to obsess over them. And if you make them the focus of your business, it will deliver results.

The second thing is investing in sensory, yes, it's an investment. Yes, it takes time and effort and sometimes costs, but there are small steps that you can take. And we **can change the way consumers perceive foodservice**, and I truly believe that, with this commitment to scientific approaches and excellence.

And then, I mean finally, we want to make money. We're businesses at the end of the day. So, leveraging sensory data to be part of that decision-making process in foodservice. The next time someone brings you something to launch in your store, I challenge you to ask them how they know that it tastes good. How do they know that this is an acceptable consumer experience? Because at the end of the day, consumer experience needs data to back it up.

So that's it. I really appreciate your attention. I went a few minutes over. But I welcome any type of questions, challenges, and discussion about this very important topic. Thank you so much.

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The Discussion

Richard Poye

Thank you, Rachel. I don't know if anybody has any specific questions right up front. Maybe you want to get that out, because I know that I do, but I don't want to be the one doing all the talking. So, if anybody has a question up front or a statement, something about what they're doing in sensory, that would be helpful.

Roy Strasburger

I do. Rachel, thank you very much. That was a very interesting presentation. I understand the idea : if you're going to put a picture of your food on a billboard, the delivery of that food product needs to look the same. Got that. I understand that if you're delivering that product, it needs to taste good. And that one of the things you're recommending is that there is more of an objective evaluation of how a product tastes.

Brand Image

But to open that up just a little bit more, and this kind of goes back to the Marriott example, if I was to give you a call and say that I want to develop an overall sensory presentation for my store, not just a burger or what have you, but when a customer walks in, there's a package, there is an image that is being presented to them. The question is how do I **create the sensory image, the sensory brand** that I want to present to a customer if I don't have the billions of dollars that Procter & Gamble has to develop the research and development of it? I mean, if I came to you, how would you help me develop something like that?

Rachel Toner

So, thank you so much. I think that's a really interesting question and also a very complex question. From a scientific perspective and an objective perspective, we always design approaches to meet objectives. So, if your objective was to develop this **brand image based upon the senses**, what I may recommend to you would be to...you would probably need a couple of prototypes to figure out what somebody might be interested in or what jives with the consumer. Even beyond sensory, the most important thing is delivering on consumer needs. So first you need to develop something that maybe the consumer wants, or you have this brand image. Then what you could do is there's been a lot of research on the sensory environment. It's actually called a **sensory walkthrough** where you could have people walk through the environment and give you feedback on the way that they're feeling. So, you can include some emotions research in that to help you understand how they're perceiving their environment. Am I answering your question? Or did you want something more specific?

Roy Strasburger

Well, you're answering my question, but you're kind of coming from the opposite direction. You're approaching it from what's wrong with the store. And I would agree that there's a great number of convenience stores that I have been in that have a negative sensory perception, that either you're smelling old oil in the fryers, or it smells dirty or looks dirty.

But is it possible to create the image that you want to create, like I want the store to smell like lilacs all the time? I mean, how do

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Presentation

you put together a sensory brand if you're building a store?

Rachel Toner

So, I think you have to decide what you want. You're totally right, I'm coming at it from the negative perspective. And from a sensory perspective and a consumer perspective, the risk of something being wrong probably has a bigger impact or something negative probably has a bigger impact on your brand than something that's positive. So, building that brand image, if you did want a store that smelled like lilacs, I mean those are absolutely things that you could test. I think it's determining the level and the congruence of all of the sensory elements that build that feeling, that brand, that sensory experience. So as I mentioned earlier, it's never just one factor. It's that **multisensory experience, which ultimately delivers on that feeling in the brand outcome.**

If your goal is to sell things, we also have to evaluate how that impacts what people are buying. I don't know if I can give you a full answer without thinking about this a little bit more, but it's definitely possible to do that with sensory approaches.

Roy Strasburger

Okay.

Eva Strasburger

So for instance, if I think of a cookie company, you walk in, you smell the cookies, they pick the smell of the most popular one, which they pump out. They generally have happy music playing, something that elevates your mood. They have colors that turn the head that visually imply this is a fun place - sprinkles and things that make your mouth water just from seeing the visuals. They have smiling, happy people looking like they really enjoy their job. And the floor is done in a certain texture. I know that we've recently been in stores where the textures of the floor indicate and lead you to the places that you might be interested in. So, it's the tactile, it's the auditory - what's the music going to be like?

Recently, on one of our Vision Groups, someone said that more important than visuals is the auditory. As you go by some product, you might hear, "Have you tasted this?" or "Darling, that smells wonderful. Come and give me some more of it." So, the auditory side is important. Also, touch, so that when you pick up something the packaging feels good, rather than flimsy versus if you're picking up something that is solid and glass, the quality of the texture and the feel of it. I think all of those senses are what you're talking about as far as putting that into the convenience store. Another example is the temperature of the store. If it's cold outside, are you walking into something that is feeling very cold and drafty? Or do you walk in and your shoulders just relax because it's warm and it's comfortable? So that's the type of package you're talking about, is that correct?

Rachel Toner

Yes, I think so. And again, from a scientific perspective, you generally alter one variable in order to understand the impact of that variable on the customer experience. So, there are challenges when it comes to changing or having so many sensory elements and how that impacts the customer. But I think what you're getting at is that overall feel. And there are absolutely ways to

measure it, yes.

Richard Poye

Hey, Mike, I think you had your hand raised?

Mike Weber

Oh no, I just had a thought. It always reminds me of why In-N-Out Burger shows you how they're making their fries in the drive-thru. That's a critical thing. They want you to see, that sets the tone for what you're going to eat.

Delivery

But I was curious, Rachel, if you've ever worked with firms on your slide? I liked your slide about the foundational stuff up through where you made to order and all the things you should be experienced thinking about. Have you talked to companies that are thinking about, or retailers where they want to **take items to delivery**? It's like, we want to make this something that is part of a pickup experience, or we want to offer it on e-com. What's the line we have to draw to make sure it lives up to that promise?

Because there are a lot of foodservice items that are just not good when it comes to delivery. You only have so much time to get it prepared and delivered, and I feel like that's probably a much bigger challenge as you think about growing your business. Roy, you mentioned this is going to be a massive differentiator. This is going to make or break the channel over time, and there's a huge upside though to taking foodservice to omnichannel. So, I just think that's a facet. I don't know if you've started to research that, Rachel, but that's one I'm fascinated by because we have such **changing expectations** for pizza if it's in location versus delivery.

Rachel Toner

Delivery

Yes, absolutely. When you think about e-commerce and delivery, those additional layers that could impact product quality. From a delivery perspective, that's something that's quite near and dear to my heart. What we know about delivery is that you have to, again, properly set up expectations for what the customer is going to deliver. And you have to be able to **understand the product risk of putting things in delivery**, that are available to delivery, that could have quality risks. For example, you might have a cold foam specialty beverage that may be available in delivery, but by the time that gets to the customer, the cold foam is completely gone and it's no longer a cold foam beverage. The customer doesn't want that. So I think from a development perspective, one, you can think about maybe finding ways or improvements or making delivery your standard, it has to pass a delivery standard for you to offer that item, or you limit your selection on delivery and say, "In our commitment to you, these are the things that we're going to deliver because we know that the quality will be what you expect when it gets to your door."

And from an e-commerce perspective, there's not a ton, but there's more and more research being done on the way that food sets up expectations for consumers. For example, a good example I can give you would be of tea, right? I'm just making this up, but maybe it's on Amazon, you're trying to sell tea. The way that product brewed, maybe the color of the tea is going to set up expectations for flavor intensity or maybe some of those aroma characteristics. So, it's about understanding what's the most

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Presentation

Consumer Experience

Richard Poye

important factors to the customer and how you're setting up those expectations for when it's received by them.

When I think about sensory, I go in and I think about who does it well, but also just think about the overall senses and how people think about it. So much of it in this conversation is really around food, but to me **it's about the entire store experience** and how do you in other areas of the store, whether it's operations, marketing, other categories together to really think about sensory and how they could do it really well? Because you could have that picture on a billboard that someone passes at 75 miles an hour, zoom by, and you could actually deliver to their expectations in the store as far as what it looks like. But if they're walking into a store that's dirty or if they walk into a store that's playing music too loud or if there's a funny smell as they come in because someone just mopped the floor with some really intense chemical, all these different things can play into it.

Strategy

So holistically, **how does the entire organization approach sensory**, I think is a way to go towards that because your example about Marriott or your example about other areas, it's really they were taken into consideration, everybody who's involved or not so that it's more consistent. Barbara, in your stores, I mean you all are doing some really forward-thinking things, but how do you think sensory plays into what you're doing? Because the visuals I've seen in your stores and the feedback that I've gotten from people, it's super positive. And so, what do you think is the impact for new stores versus older stores?

Strategy

Barbara Kessler

So our new stores and our new concept, they turn the head around on traditional convenience. We have seating and stuff. We use a shorter gondola, we have higher ceilings. We work on the way the air flows in the store so it doesn't feel thick or heavy. We do have fryers and we have flat top griddles and we're baking, we're making smash burgers to order, we're baking our pastries fresh every day. And so, **there's a lot of smells as it relates to foodservice. Honestly, we do our best to get those out of the store. We want the visual that we're cooking, I call it display cooking**, in the middle of the store. But nobody wants to walk in and smell chicken. More importantly, nobody wants to walk out and get in their car and smell like chicken. And we've all been to stores like that.

Facilities

The thing that I talk to all of my team members about is the decision to even stop at a convenience store starts before you ever leave your car before you ever get off the highway. When you're in an unfamiliar place and you need to get gas and you need to get a quick snack, you're looking around and you're looking, **how clean is that place? How well is their canopy lit up?** Are there a bunch of people hanging out by the front door? All of that. Those quick sensory cues tell people, especially younger kids, new drivers and women driving by themselves, you start to look at some of those things.

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Richard Poye

Myra Kressner

Jon Cox

So it really starts before they even leave the highway. And then when they pull into your parking lot, again, is your parking lot clean? Is it full of trash? Does it have a bunch of grease and oil stains all over the place? Do you have people hanging out in the parking lot, throwing a party? There's so much that goes into that decision on whether or not they trust you to make their food long before they even get out of their car or turn their engine off. You could be selling filet mignon and lobster in there and nobody cares. **They're not going to get that far if everything you show them [is negative].** Because as foodservice providers, we have to be detail-oriented. We have to think of the details that the customers didn't know they wanted. They just know they don't want it. So when they see it and they don't want it, then they know, "okay, yes, check, I'm not coming back here again." But when they don't see those things, then every single thing just pulls them in a little bit more.

And then once they get inside, clean, well-lit, friendly faces, and to your point, I have a pet peeve about heavy, nasty-smelling chemicals. And sometimes you have somebody in the store that out of the best part of their heart, they just think they're doing a really good job, but they just completely destroyed everything because they used an entire bottle of bleach or something they went down to this dollar store and bought and it just smells terrible. That **hurts your foodservice**. So, it's a lot of those things. Or they come in and they go to the bathroom first. The bathroom's not clean. They're not going to go order food. So, there's just **so many things that go into foodservice that you have to worry about long before you ever make any of the food itself.**

That's so true. Yeah, go ahead.

Jon, you were agreeing in the chat with Barbara. Did you want to comment a little further on that?

Yes, I think everything that she said is spot on, right? I mean, there's a sensory element that Rachel said that whether you advertise on the billboard or you advertise on the pump topper, there's something that's appealing that gets them to stop, to turn right instead of turning left. And then they get out of their car, but the trash has to be clean and the lights have to work and there has to be a safe environment. And all of that, I think, ties into the sensory piece as well.

It's not necessarily the advertising, it's not the build of the burger, but all of that is there. And then it doesn't matter how clean your store is or how good your food is if the bathrooms aren't clean.

And people are going there first, right? I mean, I'd love for us to say that the number one **reason people stop at the convenience stores to get food, but the reality of it is it's gas, it's bathroom, and it's cigarettes** in one of those three orders, and then it's everything else. And so there's so many things that we're up against before the customer even decides to get the double smash

burger, which the next time I'm in Washington D.C. I'm definitely going to go get. But I think it's just everything she's saying is so true. And all of those tie into what I think Rachel was trying to talk about.

So you could say sensory from this standpoint, well, because Rachel and I have a couple of common mutual friends in the industry, and so in my past, there were three of us sitting in a kitchen figuring out what the LTO was going to be, and if all three of us liked it, it got onto the menu. And when our director of culinary started and outsourced some sensory work and what does it taste like and how do people feel when they eat it? And just those different things. So it could be something as small as getting a focus group to taste your food, but it'd be something as large as, what does my customer see? How do they feel before they even drive onto the lot? And that's why I was agreeing with everything that Barbara said because that's the broad spectrum. I think of the things that Rachel was trying to talk about, is it could be really small detail, but it could be really large as to what the overall experience is and how do they feel?

Customer Behavior

Richard Poye

Thank you, Jon. This might be good for Bonnie or Brandon, but Bonnie, you came from Walmart and then into convenience, and so there's a shift there. Or Brandon, you've worked across so many different states during your career in different regions, and that could go with Barbara as well. But I'm just thinking about are you seeing in **differences either from sector to sector or from state to state** as far as maybe elevated or not so high standards on sensory?

Brandon Frampton

Yes, I would share with you, and I agree, **it's happening, so there's a huge diversity**. Again, not to bore you, but from Mexico all the way into Canada and from the Pacific, I've had a lot of business. And I would tell you that in my experience, the Southeast and the whole East Coast is far better, and then it starts to wander through the middle of the country. And out West, I think it's an untapped market. So, it's shocking how food is an anomaly in convenience or drinks or anything else. So, I think it's a little bit of everything, but certainly the sensory. And I think the sensory thing was spot on. We've tried everything from having great smelling coffee injected in to not. I don't know or figured out the magic formula, but I agree, I think it's huge. Sometimes it can even outpace visual. So anyway, I think it's quite different.

Consumer Experience

Richard Poye

And Bonnie, from your perspective, RaceTrac has bean to cup and you have sliced pizza, you have Swirl World. Are you seeing that varying from region to region now that you're expanding up into Ohio in different areas? Or maybe talk us through that.

Bonnie Zaring

Richard, I think you are right about geographies and how that's different, but really to lean on what others have shared, I think the **approach around a whole store sensory experience** is coming together more than it has in the past. And from my experience in retail and the conversations around visual merchandising and really **leaning in so heavily on what the guest sees**, there hasn't been as much in the c-store space because you're limited on space. You have to really be thoughtful of how you use your

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Presentation

Customer Behavior

Strategy

Richard Poye

space to pull together all of the things of sensory. We do some better around visual. Some of the others that we touched on really the olfactory smells and so forth, we probably focus in pockets. But I would say broadly just looking across c-store it's just now where we realize **the connection between all of the experience and pulling the sensory together.**

Jasmine Struble

And Jasmine, you're dealing across multiple brands and what I would consider really distinctly different areas of the country. And so how do you think sensory is playing out in that aspect there for you?

So, I would say one of the things that we worked on over the last three years was synergizing the brands, which there's different strategies for different retailers. And for us, Taco John is based up in the north, and so our biggest argument was burritos can be consumed anywhere. And everyone else prior, **folks are coming to these convenience stores, one for fuel, second for smokes, and then now they're wanting to come and grab a bite to eat** on their way to and from work. And so for us, we definitely prioritized making the burrito really our mascot for both brands. And that translates beyond just the foodservice category. So **it's one of our three pillars, which are foodservice, private label, and loyalty.** And so, we integrate foodservice within promotions in the center store. We have fuel rewards. And so that's kind of our deal and how we're trying to bridge that gap and get that awareness beyond the hot food case. We've recently been **doing a lot of packaged beverage** and foodservice synergies, so you see more of our burrito presence in the doors. So without repeating what other folks have said, that's what we're doing.

Richard Poye

And Roy, you have your hand raised. Thank you, Jasmine.

Roy Strasburger

So, Rachel, coming back to you, your second slide or so was the "Too Close" slide about somebody coming into a house and the owner doesn't smell the dogs but the visitor smells the dog. I think that that's a major problem or major situation for a lot of small operators, the mom-and-pop operators, people who have one or two stores, who are in the stores all the time. And you kind of get the boiled frog approach of you've been in there too long and you start not noticing what's happening. Would you have any recommendations for a small operator of how do they get outside of that bubble?

How do they determine that they may or may not need to do something and how can they fix the problem of not being so close? Is it bringing somebody else in or is it more of a self-awareness?

Rachel Toner

So, I mean, with many other types of problems, self-awareness can be something that's really challenging. And I'll go back to the Furby's example because part of that campaign was, some of the advertising that they did, they would have a family member come over and stage some sort of intervention and bring awareness to their problem. So, for a smaller retailer, it's probably

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Presentation

Research

Industry Image

Roy Strasburger

really challenging to understand what needs fixing in your stores. And I also don't know what types of resources they might have or not have.

So, I mean, one thing that they could do is maybe build really good relationships with their customers. Or maybe you have **some sort of survey** with a small incentive for someone to fill out and bring awareness to some of the things that are going on in your stores. That's something that, at my time at Wawa, we had Voice of the Customer. There would be little sheets, and the associates would bring attention to customers and say, "Hey, fill this out." And they'd be put into a raffle for whatever. So that's one way they could do it. And then again, maybe they want to invest in a third party and have someone come and do this. They would have to have the willingness to go and do this, but they could go out and benchmark other c-stores to see what they're doing and what those experiences are like, to be able to see what's the gap between me and you? And can I implement some of these changes?

And I appreciate that last point of benchmarking. But, if you don't recognize what your own benchmark is, it's kind of hard to compare with somebody else. And the convenience store industry, per se, has a very long history of trying to overcome **the gas station convenience store image** to get into foodservice. I mean, it's been a long struggle for a lot of people. And I think as an industry we are **getting to the point where people actually recognize us as being food purveyors**, thanks to people like RaceTrac and Wawa and Sheetz and Yesway and Dash In, developing these programs.

Basically, my understanding of what you're saying is that if I have a store, or two stores, and I wanted to know if there was a problem, I need to go outside and ask people to just tell me what the problem is. I'm not sure if Wawa, in their Voice of the Customer, actually asked people whether our stores smelled bad or not, but that's kind of the approach that one would need to take if you really want to find out.

Rachel Toner

Yes. And I mean, I think having those preset objective measures could definitely help. You're correct, we didn't ask them specifically if the stores smelled. Right. But I agree with your point. Maybe they need to have that third party to come in there and make those assessments if they're either unwilling or unable to make those assessments themselves.

Richard Poye

Go ahead, Myra.

Myra Kressner

As you talk about self-awareness, and I think that's where you started Rachel, right? You were talking about having the self-awareness so that if you're a one or two-store operator, can you get out of the bubble, get out of your bubble to raise the self-awareness?

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Presentation

Data Analysis

Rachel Toner

Yes, I think that is very possible. I generally believe that people want to do good. They want to deliver exceptional experiences to their customers. I genuinely believe that. And sometimes it takes someone else to help bring awareness to those issues. And also being willing to accept the feedback because feedback means nothing if you're not willing to apply it. **Data means nothing if you're not willing to make actionable steps** forward on that information that you receive. So I think it's complicated, and I think once we get into those situations where it's like one or two, and they don't have the self-awareness or don't understand what's going on, it becomes challenging.

Richard Poye

I think about experiences, and this goes back to my time in restaurants, where I was doing a stint at Charlie Trotter's place in Chicago. And what he would do is he would send a cook in the kitchen into the dining room halfway through the night, and that cook may be an entry-level individual, but they would end up having every single one of the courses that was in that restaurant. It was a really high-end restaurant. And the whole idea, I went back and I asked him, "What's the rationale behind that?" And he says, "Well, this person's at a really early stage in their life. They may not be able to afford to dine in the restaurant, but I'm going to give them the experience so that they know what they're delivering to and how to serve." And I've worked in hotels where they've given the opportunity for people to stay in a nice hotel. It opens the mind up to be able to see who they're serving and those types of things.

Research

So I think part of it is you begin to look at how do you elevate understanding – is **benchmarking best-in-class**, like how do people do things around smell or cleaning or those types of things? And so when the smaller store owner can go through and begin to say, "This is how best-in-class has done it," and you could begin to benchmark a series of things. And you could also, going back to your chart, you could say foundational, like you need to be here. Or you may even go through and prioritize things, like for that group and say, "These are the areas where we see as opportunities for you. These are the areas in which you can impact and get the biggest bang for your buck in there."

And it goes back to what Barbara was saying, there's things around safety, around lighting. Height of the gondolas or the height of the ceilings, there's a lot of things around that where it creates an openness, sense of more feeling there. Some colors kind of create tension. So, there's just a lot of things. But I think creating a chart which looks at what the foundational elements are and how to rank those elements that the supplier or the smaller store operator can begin to act on, or the larger one as well. But you just benchmark it in that sense.

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Rachel Toner

I think that's such a really interesting concept. And maybe, as we think about collectively contributing to convenience, to elevate, maybe there's some sort of document or a standard document that could be put together, just about awareness of sensory and environments, and education pieces for convenience retailers that maybe don't have the resources.

It might be something really interesting to put together to then give back to the convenience industry, to help bring awareness and set some of these standards, to help them.

Richard Poye

Okay, now Eva's raising her hand.

Eva Strasburger

So Richard, I was going to say, one of the major senses of course is touch, and the whole question of how are you presenting the food to the customer? Is it on a plate which flops and bends in half so things fall off? You know the pizza that falls off the plate. There is the cardboard straw that's sustainable but gets so wet that you can't actually suck out of it over time. You were talking with us earlier this week about the Starbucks ad, and you thought it sounded and looked fabulous, but it was all done showing coffee in a glass. Do you want to mention that again? Because that was a good point you were making.

Richard Poye

Yes, earlier in the week we were just talking about overall sensory and the experience. There was a Starbucks commercial, and they'd go through the entire product preparation process, and it was visually beautiful. They're making the coffee, and then they make a cappuccino drink. When I first looked at the commercials, and it's time for coffee and I was thinking, fantastic. But then I thought, this is wrong because they were serving it in this beautiful glass cup, and you could visually see it, but I'm thinking, "That's not how I'm going to get it in my Starbucks."

And so again, **my expectation** was I'm going to get this nice craft glass cup, I'm going to be able to see my entire drink, but really, I'm going to get it in a paper cup with a lid and I'm not going to be seeing that visual. So again, I know that that's on the inside of the cup, but that's not what I'm seeing when I order the coffee. It was like, it **didn't meet my expectations**, or I knew it wouldn't meet my expectations because I wouldn't get the visual.

Roy Strasburger

So Rachel, I'm going to go back to something you said just before this, when you were talking about coming up with something that helps small store owners become more self-aware. If you wanted to come up with something like that, we'd be very happy to attach it to our Vision Report to send it out with this conversation. Because I think that's a really big question. Frankly, it's not the folks who are on this call who need to be thinking about their presentation to their customers. It's the smaller operators who make up 80% of the convenience stores in the United States. And one of the things that we're trying to do with this group, and with the Vision Group Network in general, is help small operators understand issues and become better operators themselves.

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Presentation

And I think something like that would be a really helpful, and powerful, tool that we'd be able to share with people, if you were so inclined to maybe want to get involved in that.

Rachel Toner

Absolutely. I think it's really important, and the more we can bring awareness to sensory and the impact that sensory can have on this industry, I just think that it could do wonders. So yes, absolutely it can help.

Richard Poye

And maybe one last question, and this one's more for Mike. You all have a lot of interesting tools and processes that you can apply. Have you ever thought about maybe, are there ways that you could evaluate sensory? Or that you could get certain steps in place so that people could make sure they deliver the sensory tools that you thought? Because I know that you're doing production planning, but have you ever tried to add that sensory into some of those tools?

Workforce

Mike Weber

Yes, that's a great question. We have a whole sort of **guided task process**, like you pick up your device, and that's really what the employee follows, the associate follows for a lot of what they're doing with Upshop. And so now what we're doing is, we have sort of like your hero, we have your **store walk**, which we have for any size format. And what we're doing now is, because a lot of this is easy to customize, what are the key moments or your hero moments on your store walk? Because **these are labor light situations**. Gosh, the small retailers, talk about labor light. It's like associates are doing everything. So, when we launch, we're really trying to figure out, what are those key things? I mean, you have to do everything, but what are those **critical things that are really going to be the difference for your location**? And those pretty much, we use AI to say those become prioritized based on time of day.

And so, we're guiding those on that task list, on top of all the food. If it's your food, if it's a temp check or if it's a production plan, really **the store walk element plays a really big role** because that connects to all these things we're talking about. So that's how we've built that and approached it. I mean, I love this conversation because, back to what Roy was talking about, there's so many comparisons you can make in everyday life. I mean, even if you're a small operator, you still go to nice restaurants or you still go and stay in hotels, you still go to other experiences.

Disney set the bar here for how to use sensory. I don't think you ever see anybody taking out the trash. I don't even think you'd see anything happening. And there's lots of visuals that all of a sudden, a smell hits you or you touch something, you go into one of their rides. So, there's just so many great inspirations. It's just how do you make that relevant for that shopper that's walking in the door? Maybe that's going in the bathroom, but you need to pull them to the food. Just so many things. I mean, I mentioned this and then I'll shut up. Years ago, when I was in Ricker's, the whole goal was making the fountain the absolute hero and make that sound of all the ice cubes, it was all the small ice cubes, that was their thing. Big Styrofoam cups, one big size. You saw how

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Presentation

many cups people walked out with, as a visual, you go in, you see all that, everybody's leaving with the cups, and they make that ice sound really loud so that everybody would be cued to like, "You need a drink right now." And it works. I mean, it really leaves a very memorable impression. It cues you to do that. So, I think there are a lot of great comparisons out there. A lot of great examples.

Richard Poye

That's cool. Well, thank you. I'm going to kind of segue into a different part here because we have a few more minutes left. I drafted a list of topics, and it was just me, and I don't want to be the sole person who's driving what are the topics that we will discuss. And so, my initial list had menu development, product innovation, operational efficiency, foodservice profitability, technology, integration, customer experience, consumer trends, health and wellness, FSQA (Food Safety and Quality Assurance), supply chain, sensory. I want to know what's important to you all.

And maybe we don't find this out right at this moment. Maybe I have to send out something. But if we could put their cards on the table, saying, "Hey, what's interesting to me or my business?" So as we go into these next meetings, we're putting in topics that are relevant to you, not being defined solely by me. So, I didn't know if there's specific topics in which you are interested. Bonnie, Barbara, Brandon, Jasmine, if you have things that you're interested in.

Barbara Kessler

My focus this year, we just rolled out a completely new menu. So, we did the new concept, it worked out really well. We pared it down a lot less than I thought I was doing, but we made it a little easier to execute. It's not hard, but it's a full menu. So, we pared it down, we rolled it out to every one of our stores. We're in the middle of launching everything. And so, this year I'm actually cutting innovation back a little bit. I'll still have some, but this year my focus isn't on innovation as it relates to the next greatest burger or the next greatest whatever. This year's innovation is around finding innovative techniques, processes, and procedures to have consistent restaurant-quality execution every time. So that's what I'm focusing on this year.

And whether that means looking at equipment that allows me to make restaurant-quality food in a faster, more efficient way or redesigning my kitchen so that we're taking less steps and we have more time to interact with guests, to better ways to –

I hate the word job aid because it sounds so gas station-y – but a way to document the processes that gets everybody doing the same thing at the same time and transcends language barriers and learning issues and time. I need people to learn the menu as quickly as possible without having to have a menu that has one item on it. So those are the kind of things that I'm working on. This year's innovation is really a people innovation and ways to help the people execute better. Because the menu's there. The problem is my executive chef and I don't have the time to run 60 stores and do it ourselves, so we got to figure out how to make everybody else do it just as good.

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- Richard Poye** So if I heard, if I were to break that down, then it's really consistent processes, equipment, and the recipe, the job aid, that kind of thing. We'll find a new word for that.
- Barbara Kessler** Yes. Getting it out of my head and my executive chef's amazing kitchen prowess into the average employee. And being able to make sure that when I make a burger for you in my test kitchen, it looks and tastes and smells and everything exactly like it does down the street at one of my other locations. That's really my goal. And like I said, we're about to scale up in a really big way, and I want to make sure that my processes work, selfishly so I don't have to live in North Carolina for that long.
- Richard Poye** Okay, great. And Bonnie, did you have some topics you wanted to cover?
- Bonnie Zaring** Richard, I thought you had some great topics on your list, especially some really relevant ones that if we have a good dialogue around them, I think we can share ways we're solving some of those opportunities. So not right away do I have one. I'll certainly give it some thought and send over any topics that I felt are emerging, that we could all come together on.
- Jasmine Struble** I'd second that with Bonnie. The topics that you have right now I think are really great, just to get us started. And I think that there's a great group that's on this call, and so there'll be great dialogue that I'm sure will give us some extended thought and will bring on additional topics. But I would just say, from our perspective, we've worked over the last several years to optimize and streamline our processes. So I'm definitely excited to have that type of conversation. But I would say storytelling within the dispensed world, it's gotten stale, and with dispense being somewhat of an extension of foodservice, I would just say that there's a lot of different retailers out there that are coming up with the dirty sodas. And so, trying to essentially work with what we have, and not trying to reinvent the wheel, and essentially improving on the marketing and how we tell that dispensed story. Dispensed has always been self-serve and make it your own, right? It's nothing new, it's just how we present it to our guests. And so that's one of my initiatives this year.
- Richard Poye** Great. And then Brandon?
- Brandon Frampton** So, our big play, kind of my big play has three parts to it. So, what we have out here is I've got 65 stores that are employee-serve for all the 'hot-to-go' foods. I'm going to swap all of that to make it all guest or customer grab, similar to a lot of companies. So that's a big play for me. So one is, I'm sourcing equipment. I want to make sure I only buy the right equipment bunch. I've talked to other people, but looking at Flexeserve, and some of the other people, but again, open to thoughts and feedback there. The second piece is the packaging, again, because we're really new at this. And we sell quite a lot, but everything kind of comes in a boat. It doesn't matter if you buy a puff, tenders. And so, we're designing all the packaging and also putting together a brand. So

those are my two big plays.

And then the last one is we're going to do a coffee, 10-store test in coffee, we're going to get in the cold-made coffee business. So, our team members, even though we're taking 'hot to go' one way, in 10 stores we're going to put in nice espresso equipment and we're making cold drinks so we can get some of that Starbucks 70% cold drinks. So, we're making a good big play there. And then the last thing is, I'm building out two taco trucks. So that's what I'm doing. The packaging and 'hot to go' stuff are kind of my big plays.

Richard Poye

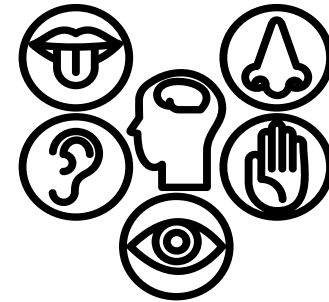
Awesome. And I don't know if I missed anybody on that piece there.

Okay. Well, Jac Moskalik was having some technical issues, so she couldn't get in, but she'll be here at the next meeting. We also have a new member who actually comes from an adjacent industry. They still run convenience stores, and they will be joining the conversation at the next meeting. So, we'll have several new people coming into this to broaden the conversation. Also, we spent a good portion today getting to know each other and looking at the rules and those types of things. At the next meeting there will definitely be more conversation around the agenda topic. I will send out a follow-up just of the items that we hope to discuss, and then if you have any additional feedback or if there's one you feel is more important let me know, like Brandon's saying, packaging, equipment, that kind of thing, that's higher for him.

And we'll begin to say, "Okay, how do we force-rank these as a group and do something that's more energizing for everybody?" And if you have something that you're really excited about or is really important to you, that's great, let us know. Also, if you know somebody who may be a potential presenter that would be able to help us, that would be good as well, because we're always looking to get the right people in the room – so long as it's not a sales pitch. Anyway, I want to end on time. I value your time here, and if you have any other questions, let's have the conversation offline. Thank you very, very much for being here today. I really appreciate it, and we all appreciate it. Take care.

Sensory Strategies for Convenience Retail

Reframing the Customer Experience



Call to Action:

- **For Whom, For What:** Make the consumer experience the focus of your business
- **Invest in Sensory:** Measure sensory touchpoints and incorporate into strategy top down
- **Make Sense, Make Cents:** Use actionable sensory data to make informed decisions, compete, and prioritize changes that deliver results



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The Problem: Too Close For Comfort



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Bring Back That Lovin' Feelin'



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A Science Of Measurement



3: Sensation / Pleasure

2: Stimulus

1: Evaluator

4: Processing

5: Self Reported Assessment
& Intended Use

A smartphone screen displaying a survey question: "How much do you like or dislike sample 204?". Below the question is a "(Select one)" prompt and a list of nine response options: "Like Extremely", "Like Very Much", "Like Moderately", "Like Slightly", "Neither Like nor Dislike", "Dislike Slightly", "Dislike Moderately", "Dislike Very Much", and "Dislike Extremely". The "Like Very Much" option is highlighted in yellow.

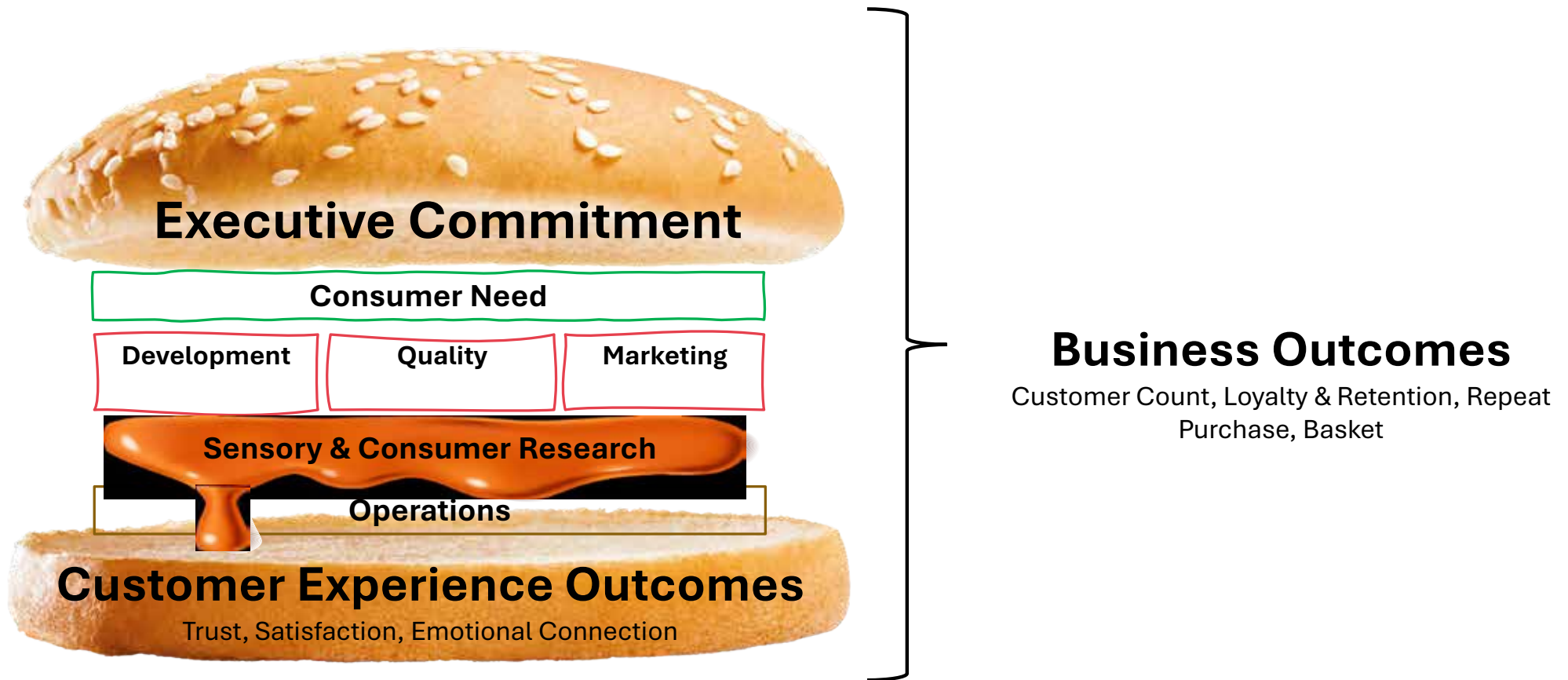
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Make Sense, Make Cents



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50,000,000

Boxes Sold & No One Noticed.



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NEW FRIES PREFERRED

2 ALMOST
TO **1**
OVER
McDONALD'S
**GUESS THAT MAKES THEM
THE SILVER ARCHES**

**Taste preference based on a national taste test by an independent research company.*



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Improofment

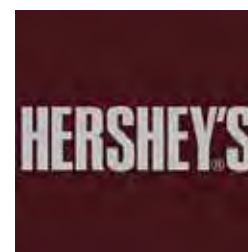


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SECTION 2

Sensory Experiences Along the Customer Journey:

Before, During, and After



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1 Before



2 Miles Ahead



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2 During



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Scent + Experience = Memory



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Multisensory Interactions



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3 After



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Mind the Gap

Expectation



Reality



Assessment

Product Problem



Quality Problem



Expectations Problem



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Past Impacts Future



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SECTION 3

Turning Senses into Strategy:

Actionable Approaches for Meaningful Change



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Commitment to Foodservice, Not Size of Chain

FACTORS	FOUNDATIONAL:	DEVELOPING:	STRATEGIC:
PRODUCT OFFERING Range & Complexity	Prepackaged or prepared	Some fresh food and limited proprietary branding	Made-to-order fresh food. Proprietary, signature recipes as core drivers.
CUSTOMIZATION Customer Control Over Experience	None or minimal	Some	High (e.g. build your own)
QUALITY MANAGEMENT & FOOD SAFETY	Reactive	Proactive: testing and monitoring of products and experiences	Core pillar of business. Standardized, robust quality and food safety programs.
SENSORY	None: relies on internal opinions or feedback.	Relies on expertise of culinary professionals or product development. Maybe occasional testing ad hoc.	Integrated across research development, and quality processes.
SUPPLIER COLLABORATION	Minimal. Standard offerings. Accept product 'as is'	Moderate. Some input into recipe adjustments.	Partnerships: Co-development of innovative products
MARKETING	Focus on price and availability	Some highlighting of quality and freshness (e.g. 'freshly baked')	Sensory and product attributes leveraged as strategic advantage.
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE	Convenience focused	Emerging focus on quality and satisfaction	High expectations of quality and experience.
ACTIONABLE SENSORY TACTICS	- Incorporate sensory into audits - Work with vendors for sensory information	- Integrate sensory research into product development cycle - Develop success criteria	- Conduct market research benchmarking to edge out competition


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Make Sense. Don't Guess.

1) Compete:

Market Research & Concept Development



Identify the Sensory Advantage: Benchmarking of Product vs. Competitors. Refine Concepts.

Create Competitive Retail Experience: Audit of In Store Experience

2) Create:

Product/Recipe Development



Collaborate with PD/Culinary Teams

Test Products with Consumers

Optimize with Sensory Feedback

Quantify Product Risk Before Launch

3) Commit:

Market Test & Launch



Ongoing Consumer Feedback for Quality Assurance.



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Together We Can Transform What Consumers Expect from Convenience

Call to Action:

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Thank You!



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Small Operator Sensory Snapshot



We get it. You've got a business to run, and chances are your focus is on providing a convenient and quick visit.

But the sensory experience -- *how your customers perceive your store and your products through sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste* -- impacts their overall satisfaction.

Taking small steps to enhance sensory experiences can make big differences in consumer satisfaction and can increase quality perception and the amount of time and money spent in store.

Notes:

Write down two sensory related improvements you can make to improve the customer experience.



Sight

What do I see?

A clean, well organized, and spacious environment allows customers to find what they are looking for without becoming overwhelmed.



Smell

What do I smell?

Be on alert for negative, strong, or pungent smells (e.g. trash, fried food, cleaners). Customers associate bad smells with poor quality and safety.



Sound

What do I hear?

The right music can positively impact the customer experience. Avoid silence as it can make customers uncomfortable. Opt for upbeat music for your target demographic.



Touch

What do I feel?

Appropriate store temperature and clean high touch surfaces encourage customers to spend time in your store and engage with products.



Taste

What do I taste?

Consumers usually cannot 'try before they buy'. Sample products regularly to bring awareness to products. Discuss with customers and encourage feedback.



CFVG Views

In The Room with CFVG

Presentation

Small Operator Sensory Guide

Instructions:

1. Read through the guide, walk your store and answer the self-evaluation questions to the best of your ability.
2. Identify small changes to implement based upon best practices.

	Category	Why it Matters	Self-Evaluation	Best Practice
First Impressions	Storefront & Entryway	The storefront is the first impression of your store. A clean welcoming entrance builds trust and encourages consumers to shop.	Is the storefront clean, with limited signage and no clutter?	☐ Regularly clean the storefront, limit signage (less is more), and remove garbage and clutter.
	Store Layout	A well-organized store makes shopping easy and enjoyable. Clutter overwhelms customers and impacts their ability to make choices.	Can customers easily navigate your store and find what they need without asking?	☐ Make space and organize to direct customers to core areas.
	Cleanliness	Cleanliness is a commitment to your business and the consumer sensory experience. Clean spaces build trust, and make customers feel comfortable, safe, and respected.	Are floors, surfaces, and restrooms clean?	☐ Implement a strict cleaning program. ❖ Customers want to touch and engage with your products.
Environmental Factors	Smell	Customers associate bad smells with poor quality and safety.	When I walk into my store, what do I smell? Are there any unpleasant odors (garbage, bathroom), overly strong odors (fried food), or inappropriate odors (fragranced cleaners)?	☐ Make sure your store is clean, including restrooms. ☐ Remove garbage frequently. ☐ Avoid cleaning products that are overly fragranced.
	Lighting	Proper lighting makes the store feel safe and inviting.	Is the lighting bright enough to feel safe and inviting?	☐ Upgrade or replace lighting to enhance visibility and warmth.
	Music	Background music can influence consumer mood and shopping pace. Silence can make customers feel uncomfortable.	Is there background music and is it appropriate in volume and mood?	☐ Choose music that suits your brand and appeals to your target customers. Opt for upbeat music. For example, pop music.
	Temperature	Customers are less likely to spend time in stores that feel too hot or too cold.	Is the store temperature appropriate and comfortable for customers?	☐ Regularly check and adjust temperature for comfortable environment.
Quality & Feedback	Food and Beverage	Customers want to know how fresh your prepared or hot food is. Cleanliness and rigorous food safety programs are critical.	Are codes clearly visible? Does the food look fresh? If in question, ask yourself, would you feel proud serving this item to someone you care for?	☐ Actively rotate and inspect items during the day in front of customers. Make food safety and quality a visible part of your daily processes. ☐ Discard items that do not meet quality standards. When in doubt, throw it out!
	Sampling	Sampling brings awareness to new items, builds sensory connection and encourages purchase.	Do I engage customers to sample products regularly to drive awareness and trial?	☐ Sample to engage customers and receive feedback. ❖ Consider sampling high margin items to drive sales.
	Customer Feedback	Feedback is a gift. Obtaining continuous feedback from customers and associates helps make informed improvements.	Do I have a system to actively collect anonymous feedback?	☐ Implement system to collect feedback – for example, a short electronic survey with a link. Reward customers and employees for their feedback. Reward employees for fixing the problems addressed.

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The Convenience Foodservice Vision Group (CFVG) brings together a diverse range of industry leaders across culinary, marketing, operations, technology, sensory, safety, and select solution providers. The group addresses menu development, product innovation, operational efficiency, foodservice profitability, technology integration, customer experience, consumer trends, health and wellness, FSQA, supply chain management and more. The group is committed to sharing its views and perspectives to advance convenience retailing. CFVG operates under the Vision Group Network, which gathers the collective knowledge and ideas of its members to create a legacy of sharing within the retail community. For more information and to sign up for future Vision Reports, visit our website: vgnsharing.com/vision-report-library



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