

Supermarkets change up their online/in-store biz models to lure customers

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Teaser: Check out how grocers are enticing shoppers digitally and on location.

You've probably noticed that going to your local supermarket in many instances has morphed into a rather different experience compared to your weekly shopping from years past. With tight margins and intense competition to contend with, major grocery chains are looking to wrangle in new customers any which way they can. Many have rolled out innovative online marketing campaigns coupled with unique in-store promotions and added services not normally associated with supermarkets.

[ShopRite, http://www.shoprite.com/](http://www.shoprite.com/) for instance, has a Digital Coupon Center -- once you create an account, you can load coupons to the grocery chain's Price Plus club card, and offers are automatically added to the card. The offers stay on the card until redeemed or they expire. ShopRite's My Virtual Pantry, also provides a welter of data to facilitate shopping -- clickable sections include Past Purchases and Shopping Lists, Weekly Ad, Digital Coupons, My Price Plus Points, and Recipes.

And once you've downloaded/reviewed what you need, stroll in to the ShopRite of Greater Morristown in New Jersey, for instance, and you'll find a European Food Hall and a Health & Wellness Center, which includes a fitness studio offering everything from Zumba classes to yoga. There's also a high-end liquor store where you can purchase craft beers and fine wines from every major wine region worldwide. And before you exit, you can consult with an in-house cosmetologist.

"You can't do fitness online," said COO John Sumas of Village Super Market Inc., a member of a co-op that includes ShopRite. "Getting a significant amount of people to show up to a building is a value in itself."

Other well-known chains are following suit. [Whole Foods http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/](http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/) provides a free weekly e-newsletter that provides everything from sales flyers to coupons to recipes to helpful tips. The company also has a site section called Healthy Eating. There are separate areas covering Cooking and Shopping Tips, How-tos (videos featuring experts that tell you how to make healthy meals), Family and Special Diets, Cooking and Shopping Tips, even a What to Eat section providing tips on getting key nutrients in your daily diet.

And once you physically visit one of their stores, more bells and whistles -- one Whole Foods market in Augusta, Georgia provides a putting green for golf aficionados who simply can't wait to get on a course and practice. Some other Whole Foods stores even offer bike repair stations.

Meanwhile, [Kroger's https://www.kroger.com/](https://www.kroger.com/) is testing technology allowing customers to scan items themselves before putting them in the cart to speed up the checkout process.

That's just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Earlier this year, U.S. News & World Report reported that we'll start seeing more drive-thru aisles at supermarkets. [Targit, https://www.targit.com/en](https://www.targit.com/en) a Danish business intelligence and analytics software developer, helped create such a model for [Swiss Farms, http://swissfarms.com/](http://swissfarms.com/) a supermarket just outside of Philadelphia. You can order everything from Greek yogurt to waffles from your mobile phone, PC, or tablet.

Market research firm Research and Markets summed up the sea changes occurring in the food retailing industry:

"From harnessing social media to initiating mobile payments to integrating digital loyalty platforms to gauging the related shift in consumer food retail engagement habits and preferences, the industry has its hands full in planning tomorrow's grocery experience."