



IS YOUR WORKFORCE READY FOR WHAT'S NEXT?

With technology accelerating and talent expectations rising, grocers must evolve how they lead, train and retain their teams

By **Rebecca Harris**

How do you prepare a workforce for a future that seems to change by the minute?

From technological leaps and geopolitical events to shifting employee dynamics, the business world is moving fast—no exaggeration. “The pace of change is quickening—and that’s been true throughout history—but, we’re starting to get to a point where it’s really hard for organizations to handle that pace,” says Gordon Sandford, national lead partner for digital transformation and lifelong learning, EY Canada.

Add to that a hefty dose of turmoil. “We’re at a stage where once-in-a-lifetime events aren’t once-in-a-lifetime anymore. Whether it’s wildfires or COVID or tariffs, these big jolts are happening fast and frequently,” he says.

Kate Turner, managing director at Accenture’s retail practice, sees similar challenges. “Many organizations feel like they can’t keep up with their customers—and the same goes for their employees,” she says, explaining that businesses are managing a uniquely diverse workforce with multiple generations working together, each with different needs. At the same time, technology—especially artificial intelligence (AI)—is advancing at an unprecedented rate.

“The use of AI is speeding up many things we didn’t even think last year would be possible—and now here they are,” Turner says. “All of these forces

combined are creating an incredible pace of change for organizations that they're struggling to keep up with or identify priority areas, while also serving evolving employee needs."

For Canadian grocers, the clock is ticking to future-proof their workforce—or risk falling behind. That requires rethinking workforce strategies that embrace change and equip their employees for the future—however unpredictable. "We get very preoccupied with the next shiny widget," says Sandford, "but we have got to make sure that we're bringing people along ... It's not a better world if the people aren't ready to flourish in it."

Getting smarter about upskilling, reskilling and AI-skilling

While AI is one of the shiny new tools transforming grocery retail—from automating inventory management to real-time data analysis—the opportunity extends beyond back-end efficiencies and into employees' daily work. This starts with empowering employees to use AI responsibly, supported by training and guidelines, says Jeanet Lamoca, senior career and leadership coach at Careers by Design.

"Not allowing employees to use AI isn't going to stop them from using it. So, get wise to it, and then incorporate it as a strategy," Lamoca says. "You can either be bulldozed by it or you can be in front of it and start to build and shape how it's used in your organization."

She recommends involving employees—particularly younger ones or early adopters—to help inform those strategies. Teams can find out how people in the organization are currently using AI, how they'd like to use it, how it improves their work and how it might give them more time to do meaningful work versus routine tasks, advises Lamoca.

At Longo's, that approach is already in motion. The company recently assembled an AI accelerator team, consisting of representatives from areas such as operations, supply chain, human resources, IT and finance. "Their focus is building our communications around what tools we have available and how to properly use them, as well as identifying use cases that can drive efficiencies and make work a bit faster and easier for team members," explains Liz Volk, chief human resources officer at Longo's. The company is also developing a training curriculum and workshops so employees can feel more comfortable using the tools.

The appetite for learning is certainly there. According to Accenture's recent report, *Reinventing Enterprise Models in the Age of Generative AI*, 94% of employees want to learn new skills and work with tools such as generative AI. Yet, only 5% of organizations are actively reskilling their workforces at scale.

"Organizations need to think about how to incorporate AI into their business functions—across everything their employees are doing," Turner says. "That creates an opportunity for organizations to upgrade skillsets to remain competitive. It also changes the dynamic—helping people to use AI rather than thinking of it as something that will replace their job. They also need to consider the role it plays in efficiency and productivity, freeing up people's time to think about more strategic problems they need to solve."

This technological shift extends to the front line, where tasks are becoming increasingly high-tech. "Many stores have already adopted tools like handheld scanners, digital

pricing systems and new inventory platforms," notes Anvesha Mukherjee, founder and CEO of the Institute for Human Capital Practitioners. Staff is also expected to assist customers with self-checkouts, mobile apps and digital payments. "Their roles are evolving—they're not just scanning items and giving customers the bill," she says. "They need to guide customers through the process and troubleshoot."

That means training strategies must evolve as well. "On-the-job learning works best, especially in such a dynamic environment," says Mukherjee. She recommends retailers use short, digital lessons between shifts and peer coaching to help employees quickly build confidence with new tools.

Rethinking leadership for a new era

Along with new technology, the workforce of the future demands new leadership skills—moving away from one-size-fits-all approaches. "For years, the archetype of a great leader was a charismatic figure with a clear vision—a command-and-control style," says EY Canada's Sandford. "Going back to the pace of change, it's very hard to be that leader these days and say, 'I have an exact vision.'"

Instead, leadership today requires adaptability, emotional intelligence and collaboration. "We're seeing the growth of servant leadership, which is a very different paradigm," Sandford says. "A servant leader would say, 'I'm not exactly sure what the future is, but I'll engage with my team, and we will figure it out.'"

The problem is that many leadership development strategies haven't evolved to reflect this shift. As Sandford explains, organizations still tend to promote high-performing "doers" without fully preparing them for the transition. "Many organizations aren't building that mentor-apprentice guidance to this new style of leadership," he says.

To bridge that gap, organizations must rethink how leadership is built—not just taught. That means moving beyond traditional courses and training. "We need to infuse more learning and apprenticeship into the flow of work to help build people to be better leaders," Sandford says. "You need to show people the way."

Lamoca from Careers by Design recommends a shift toward a coaching leadership style that empowers teams to become more self-managing. This requires leaders to "let go of being the authority of all things" and give teams greater input. "That is really hard for a lot of leaders—it means delegating and giving teams more responsibility and accountability, but also supporting them."

From wages to wellness: Meeting evolving employee needs

What do today's employees want from their work experience? More than just a paycheck, they're seeking meaningful growth and genuine support that goes beyond basic needs.

Longo's exemplifies this shift with a comprehensive approach to employee support. It offers a variety of well-being programs, from regular workshops during its "Well-being Wednesdays" series to employee assistance programs and mental health awareness events. Longo's taps into its health- and wellness-focused vendors for such events and recently brought in support dogs to spread positivity in the office.

Volk emphasizes the importance of consistent communication, so employees get the most out of Longo's support

programs. Its twice-weekly internal newsletter highlights the company's wellness offerings and how employees can take advantage of them.

This focus on well-being is one of the most transformative trends in the workforce—and it's reflected globally. According to EY's recent study, *The First Global Generation*, 51% of young people (aged 18 to 34) worldwide rank their mental and physical health as the primary measure of future success—outranking family relationships (45%) wealth (42%) and occupation (41%).

"They don't necessarily believe in the old career model where you gut it out in the beginning and reap the rewards later," says Sandford. "They don't see that long-term payout." Upcoming generation Z and generation Alpha are prioritizing health, well-being and purpose above compensation, he adds. "It's about total rewards versus just compensation." And while generational differences in the workforce aren't new, Sandford says, "I would encourage leaders to understand that these may be more significant and more pervasive."

Of course, money still matters—and retailers may need to step it up in today's economic climate. Walmart Canada is doing just that, having recently announced an additional \$32.7 million in pay increases for eligible employees—on top of nearly \$200 million in earlier boosts to pay and benefits.

The company says it regularly conducts compensation reviews to ensure its associates are offered competitive pay, along with solid benefits and career development offerings. In addition to health and dental coverage, for example, Walmart Canada provides access to 24-7 virtual care, employee assistance programs and well-being programs through Telus Health.

As part of its Live Better U educational program, Walmart covers the full cost of tuition, books and course fees for career-driven learning and development. "Our associates are our greatest assets, and investing in good jobs is key to attracting talent," said Steve Schrobilgen, chief operations officer, end to end at Walmart Canada, in a press release.

Beyond job perks, employees are increasingly prioritizing benefits like growth—but not just climbing the ladder. "Many early and mid-career workers want opportunities to grow—not just upwards, but laterally, too," says Career by Design's Lamoca. "That growth gives people security and fulfilment—it helps them feel they're learning and contributing more."

Flexibility also remains crucial in today's workforce—especially younger people—despite the push on the return to office. "While many employers are looking to have their workforce come back in to some extent, I think offering flexible work schedules is still important," says Lamoca. "For those in their early careers, it's important to stress touchpoints that are in person so they can learn from more senior staff and create those connections."

Meeting these varied needs requires strategies that are tailored to generational differences, especially considering there are now five generations in the workforce at once, notes Accenture's Turner. "Gen Z wants more purpose, feedback and flexibility in their jobs, so organizations need strategies around creating hybrid working environments. They can also start thinking about tailoring skilled pathways to address multi-generational needs. That's key because the needs of gen Z look very different than boomers—and then there's everything in between that spectrum."

Don't believe the hype: DEI is still a priority

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) was one of the hottest workplace topics over the past few years, with many companies making bold, public commitments. Today, the U.S. is seeing significant pushback—driven by government orders and legal challenges—that has led some major corporations to scale back their DEI initiatives.

While the rhetoric might be spilling over the border, moves to undo DEI are not taking hold in Canada, according to Wendy Cukier, academic director and founder of the Diversity Institute at Toronto Metropolitan University.

"While it's true that multinationals based in the United States are certainly trying to figure out how they navigate new rules there versus requirements here, the Canadian legal, constitutional, human rights and jurisprudence frameworks that are in place are unassailable," says Cukier. "In my view, it's business as usual in Canada."

She affirms the business case for DEI policies remains strong—especially in retail—as consumer demographics shift and diversify. Cukier points out that if 30% of a retailer's market is made up of racialized people or newcomers, if 7% of Canadians seek halal products, and if women are making the majority of purchasing decisions, then ignoring that diversity means missed opportunities.

There's a strong case on the labour front, too. "If you're not doing a good job on equity, diversity and inclusion, you will not be able to attract the best and the brightest," Cukier says. "We know that younger people, in particular, pay close attention to this, especially when it comes to the 2SLGBTQI+ community. A significant portion of young people will judge organizations based on their corporate social responsibility, environmental practices and EDI practices."

For its part, Longo's is staying the course—continuing to focus on DEI through key pillars such as leadership engagement, education and training, and community support. "As an example, we'll be participating in the Toronto Pride Parade and inviting our team members to join," says Volk. "So, we're not dialing back anything and [parent company] Empire has the same philosophy ... In fact, they're finding that weaving DEI into the strategy is even more important."

New research backs up the importance of DEI to employees. In a national survey by the Diversity Institute in partnership with the Future Skills Centre and Environics Institute, nearly half of the 5,000 Canadian participants believe their organization is paying the right amount of attention to DEI, while 22% think it's paying too little. Just over a quarter (26%) say their organization is paying too much attention to DEI.

"The research is clear that when people feel valued and appreciated, and when young people see practices that align with their values, you're going to improve retention and productivity," says Cukier. "Canada is changing, your market is changing, your talent pool is changing ... But, fundamentally, this stems from commitments to values that are inherently Canadian and provide a tremendous advantage." **CG**

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Winning in the new age of health and wellness



Grocers are evolving from food purveyors to health partners, offering personalized products and services to support consumers' complete wellness journeys

By Rebecca Harris

“YOU HAVE A million problems until you have a health problem. Then you have one problem.”

This saying captures a hard-hitting truth: nothing is more important than our health. As health and wellness takes centre stage, it's no longer about chasing the latest diet craze, juice cleanse or fitness fad. Now, consumers of all ages are embracing a more holistic approach to well-being—one that spans everything from gut health and muscle building to mental health and weight loss. This shift presents a significant opportunity for grocery retailers. After all, what better place for products and services that support overall health than the grocery store?

The numbers reflect the growing importance of this trend. Globally, the health and wellness market was estimated at US\$6.8 trillion in 2024 and is expected to increase to nearly \$9 trillion by 2028, according to Statista. A 2024 report by Dunnhumby, *Better for You (Customer), You (Brand) and You (Retailer)*, reveals that health-conscious shoppers account for about 20% of the \$1.7-trillion grocery industry in the United States. Previous research from Dunnhumby found nearly two-thirds (64%) of U.S. consumers rank physical health as their most important need—ahead of mental health (46%) and their long-term financial future (32%). In *Canadian Grocer's 2025 GroceryIQ Study*, 73% of Canadian shoppers identified as being health-conscious—a five-point increase from the previous year.

“Health and wellness is definitely a growing opportunity and likely a faster-growing need state for consumers compared to the general grocery market,” says Erich Kahner, director of competitive strategy and insights at Dunnhumby. “So, it's a [key area] for growth. That's true in the U.S., Canada and globally, but the growth rates in the Americas are even higher than in other countries.”

Damon Tanzola, senior vice-president, real estate and health & wellness at Calgary Co-op, notes that people of all ages are embarking on health and wellness journeys at different stages of their lives. “That’s partly because there is so much education available, whether people are getting it online, through shopping at stores or speaking with nutritionists,” he says. As consumers become more educated about health and wellness, Tanzola adds, “the focus isn’t just on nutrition and supplements—there’s a massive movement towards mental and physical health.”

Retailers aiming to lead in this space must embrace every aspect of the health and wellness journey. “The rules have changed,” says Patrick Rodmell, partner and president at retail consultancy and creative agency Rodmell & Company. “Grocers have to stop thinking of themselves as just a warehouse of sustenance and indulgence. You want to own the knowledge and solutions for customers because food is such a key part.” Leaders in this space, he adds, will be retailers that “develop a comprehensive strategy that includes products, services and solutions for people to get healthy and stay healthy—both physically and mentally.”

The evolving health-product landscape

As the demand for holistic health and wellness grows, the grocery sector is seeing both the continuation of established trends and a shift toward addressing emerging health needs. According to Dunnhumby’s Kahner, these longstanding priorities remain:

“Eating food that is less processed, more natural and organic because consumers recognize it’s better for the body and better for the planet. That’s been a trend for a while.”

Ran Goel is CEO of Mama Earth, an independent online grocer that focuses on local, sustainable, organic groceries. He started out in the urban farm and delivery space 15 years ago with Fresh City Farms, which acquired Mama Earth in 2022. One major shift Goel has noticed over the years is there is much broader consciousness and knowledge around what is truly healthy.

“The idea that we need to eat more whole foods, real foods and less processed foods, I think people really understand that now,” Goel says. “It’s less of an education for the customer now and more about how we can help them act on that knowledge.”

Another trend he has observed is a focus on functional foods. “People are becoming more sophisticated in drawing specific connections between food and gut health, food and brain health, and food and muscle building,” says Goel. “There is much more of a focus on getting specific kinds of foods for specific kinds of objectives. There’s always been a niche market for that, but it’s becoming more mainstream.”

For gut health, for example, Mama Earth customers are buying products such as raw turmeric, sourdough and other fermented foods. Goel notes, however, that there is one aspect of healthy eating that hasn’t changed: “It’s always good to eat your fruits and vegetables,” he says, noting that fresh produce accounts for more than half of Mama Earth’s revenue.

On the packaged-food front, Rodmell points to a new

development that will make it easier for shoppers to identify healthier options: Canada’s upcoming front-of-pack nutrition labelling requirements. Under the new rules—taking effect in January 2026—prepackaged foods and beverages high in sugar, sodium and/or saturated fats must display a clear and concise nutrition symbol on the front of the package. “The baseline for retailers is going to be to have a better range of products that address specific dietary needs—for example, gluten-free, low-sodium and low-sugar items,” he says. “Many of these products are already in stores, but they need to showcase them much more, obviously, in this new environment.”

Getting a boost with supplements

In the world of supplements, people are discovering ways to elevate their physical and mental well-being. Calgary Co-op, which offers more than 5,000 natural health products in its

Natural Choice store-within-a-store, is seeing rising demand for creatine—a substance naturally found in muscle cells and known for enhancing exercise performance and boosting muscle mass. While creatine was once primarily associated with bodybuilders, Tanzola says new research shows it can support cognitive function as well. This has sparked greater interest among women, who naturally produce less creatine than men.

Alongside creatine, protein powders are seeing an uptick, which Tanzola attributes to more options featuring cleaner ingredient decks, less sugar, fewer fake ingredients and more plant-based options. “People are supplementing more because they understand what they’re missing throughout the day—whether they missed a meal or didn’t get all the nutrients they needed in that last meal,” he says. “Again, it comes down to being educated. They understand how many milligrams they had of something per day. And that’s exciting—it’s almost like a little science test every day. Did I get enough carbs and proteins and all the other things that I need?”

This includes young consumers, who are jumping on the macro-tracking bandwagon. “Even my teenagers are now questioning what we’re serving for dinner, asking, ‘What’s the carb and protein ratio? I have to go to the gym later and I need to fuel up,’” says Tanzola. “When we were growing up, it was consumption for pleasure more than consumption for fuel.”

Gen Z: No to artificial colours, yes to healthy guts

While their gen-X parents may have grown up on sugary cereals and processed foods, generation Z is much more mindful about what they put in their bodies.

Sherry Frey, vice-president of total wellness at NIQ, points out that generation Z’s buying habits are evolving in fascinating ways. The demographic, who are currently 12 to 27 years old (NIQ tracks 18 to 27), index high on attributes such as no artificial colours, flavours and ingredients, along with being humane and cruelty-free. “We have also seen them index high on health-related products with claims around the microbiome, eye health and mental health,” Frey notes.

For Frey, that generation Zers are already prioritizing

Generation Zers are already prioritizing wellness-focused products, despite having relatively limited disposable income

wellness-focused products, despite having relatively limited disposable income, speaks volumes, especially as they will continue to move into their peak earning years.

“We’re hypothesizing that there is a higher level of awareness than any other demographic ever had,” she says. “They’re already thinking about aging and they’re aware of rising cancer rates among young people, especially colorectal cancers. They’re asking, ‘What can I do today, proactively and preventatively?’ We think this will continue to grow dramatically as they start earning more and have more discretionary income to spend where their priorities are in health.”

Jo-Ann McArthur, president of Nourish Food Marketing, notes there is an opportunity for food and beverage manufacturers to develop products aimed at gen-Z women’s health. “Generation Z is just not accepting of their needs not being met, so they’re demanding more,” says McArthur. “They’re also the tech-first generation, so they’ve got the wearables, the continuous glucose monitors, the Apple watches. They know where they’re at in their menstrual cycles. So, they’re expecting food and beverage companies to support them in those journeys as well. And they’re going to be more demanding than boomers who went through menopause unassisted.”

GLP-1 drugs: Grocers must do more with consumers eating less

A major trend reshaping consumer behaviour is the rising popularity of GLP-1 (glucagon-like peptide 1) drugs. Originally developed to treat diabetes, these medications are gaining attention for their appetite-suppressing effects and ability to aid weight loss.

A 2024 survey by Dalhousie University’s Agri-Food Analytics Lab and Caddle, found about 10% of the adult population in Canada uses a GLP-1 drug, or between 900,000 to 1.4 million people. Of those, 45.5% said they are eating less, 22% claimed to eat at restaurants less often, and 16% reported buying fewer groceries. Among the items they’re cutting out are sweet bakery goods, packaged cookies, chocolate and candy, salty snacks, carbonated soft drinks and alcohol.

NIQ has also observed declines in consumption; however, Frey spots opportunity for grocers. “The initial reaction [to GLP-1 drugs] was ‘this is terrible because these people are eating less,’” Frey says. Now, retailers understand these are valuable shoppers with a household of people. “You want to support them on their journey. You want them in your stores. So, how do you help them?”

One way is to offer more products that support their digestive health, as many consumers on GLP-1 drugs have digestive challenges such as nausea and constipation. McArthur says soothing teas are one example. “Hydration is also a huge issue with this group, but consumers find water on its own boring,” she adds. An opportunity here is enhanced hydration—adding functional benefits such as adaptogens and electrolytes. “[People on GLP-1 drugs] don’t want juice or soda, so how can you elevate water a bit?” says McArthur.

Grocers can also capitalize on GLP-1 users’ shift away from restaurants, with McArthur highlighting an untapped opportunity in the home meal replacement (HMR) area. “If one person is on the drug, it affects the whole family—and food is where we connect and socialize,” she says. “People who are on

these drugs are eating at home more, but they’re eating a lot less. How do you have an experience where you’re sharing food and connecting through food in a way that works for couples and families? How do you bring the joy back into that? So, there could be an HMR strategy where a retailer comes up with family meals and small plates—something that’s going to work for everybody.”

Another avenue is supporting consumers when they stop taking GLP-1 drugs. Frey explains that people on these medications tend to lose muscle mass so, if they gain weight, they’re adding fat to that deficit. Whether it’s through in-store dietitians or pharmacists, she recommends retailers “talk about what’s important as part of their weight loss and GLP-1 journey ... and help them through the whole process.”

Beyond the aisle: How grocers can tailor health and wellness services

As consumers prioritize health in all aspects of their lives, grocers are recognizing the growing importance of personalized services that go beyond the products on their shelves. Dunnhumby’s report notes retailers are investing in services such as personalized coaching, nutrition, healthcare and fitness classes. In the United States, for example, the retailer Hy-Vee and healthcare technology provider Soda Health launched Smart Benefits, allowing customers to receive personalized benefits in areas such as fresh produce, over-the-counter pharmacy items, clinical services and nutritional counselling. They also receive personalized health support, including reminders about health screenings and prescription refills.

Even smaller retailers and those without pharmacies can offer personalized health advice. “They have a lot of customer data, so they’re able to look at the types of food products people are purchasing ... and through personalized offers and communications, they can help people understand what the next best, healthiest product is,” says Dunnhumby’s Kahner.

Calgary Co-op is putting additional resources behind personalized advice. The retailer has long had Natural Choice advisors in dedicated areas of the stores who educate customers on natural health products. “Natural Choice advisors are solely focused on the Natural Choice area and the products and services we provide there,” explains Tanzola. Now, Calgary Co-op is developing plans to have either nutritionists or dietitians in its stores who can educate customers and create personalized menus and food plans for members, which will span the grocer’s full product offering.

As people are no longer just seeking advice from doctors and pharmacists, Rodmell advises grocers to broaden their view of health and wellness consultation. For grocers, he envisions an app that invites customers to create a health profile by answering a few basic questions. The app would help them choose a food plan and create a shopping list that’s tailored to their health needs. “Grocers can tap into people’s profiles and provide meaningful advice, counsel and even promotions on certain items that align with their health needs,” says Rodmell. “The personalization of health advice combined with the integration of technology ... that’s the Holy Grail for grocers. **CG**

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FROM KITCHEN CONFIDENCE TO COMMUNITY

BUILDING, HOW GROCERS CAN CATER TO

THE DISTINCT NEEDS AND HABITS OF BOTH

YOUNGER AND OLDER SHOPPERS

By Rebecca Harris

ON ONE END: baby boomers born between 1946 and 1965. Raised on home cooking and TV, they came of age during a time of great social upheaval. “They rebelled against oppression, but they tend to be more old school now ... and many have struggles with technology,” says Johanna Faigelman, founder and CEO of HumanBranding, a qualitative research consultancy grounded in cultural anthropology.

At the other end, generation Z (born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s)—true digital natives raised on convenience foods and YouTube. “They were born with an iPhone in their hand, and they’ve never looked back,” Faigelman says. They’re also a lot like their millennial counterparts who “are more focused on the environment and social causes,” she adds.

For grocers planning for the future of food, understanding what drives both younger and older consumers is essential. Boomers still hold significant spending power, possessing most household wealth. Generation Z may not be in their peak earning years yet, but they soon will be. As many start families, they’ll become the primary shoppers grocers need to win over.

From what gets shoppers in the door to what they put in their carts, here’s a look at how grocers can better serve both ends of the age spectrum.

Health, ease and convenience rule for generation Z

Gen-Z consumers have clear expectations on the product front: food should be healthy and easy to prepare. According to PwC’s *Voice of the Consumer 2025* study, gen-Z Canadians are far more likely than

older generations to follow plant-based diets: 20% follow vegetarian or vegan diets compared to 12% of the overall population and 22% consume more alternative meats versus 13% overall.

“Gen Z wants better-for-you and local products, and they talk about eating healthier and eating less meat and other animal products,” says Elisa Swern, PwC Canada’s national retail and consumer lead. “But, when it comes down to dollars and cents, right now it’s hard for them to follow through. However, it’s not going to stay this way. The economy will turn around and gen Zs are going up the income ladder. Looking to the future, grocers should pay attention to gen Z’s aspirations because even if they can’t afford them now, they will go forward.”

Convenience is just as important as health to younger consumers—and they want products that deliver both. This group is the most likely to consume ready-to-eat meals, partially prepared foods and order takeout from the likes of Uber Eats, notes HumanBranding’s Faigelman. These consumers seek affordable, somewhat healthy options that aren’t ultra-processed or overly difficult to prepare. “They’re balancing foodie values with convenience,” she says. “They don’t want to do all the work of a home-cooked meal, but they want food to feel natural and fresh.”

Scratch cooking and functional foods for boomers

While younger consumers lean into convenience, boomers are more apt to cook from scratch. New Mintel research found boomers are less likely to purchase home-meal replacement (HMR) options than younger consumers. “They came of age when people cooked more versus ordering in, and it’s a skill they’ve honed over time,” says Joel Gregoire, Mintel’s associate director, food and drink. “We see that boomers tend to be more confident in the kitchen.”

Even among boomers who stick with tradition, what they look for in their food products is evolving as they age. One area of opportunity for grocers is functional foods such as beverages infused with immunity boosts, protein, fibre or probiotics, explains Jeff Weiss, president and CEO of Age of Majority, a research-driven marketing agency.

For older consumers, grocery stores as community hubs represent a significant opportunity

Gen-Z consumers have clear expectations on the product front: food should be healthy and easy to prepare

Clean eating is another trend food retailers and brands can capitalize on. “Older adults avoid ingredients like sugar, salt and aspartame,” says Weiss, citing research from his firm. “They want fewer and cleaner ingredients in general. Specific to produce, older adults want to support local farmers and are looking for seasonal products.”

Age of Majority research also found that many older adults are eager to explore new foods and flavours. “There’s this perception that they want to have porridge every morning for breakfast ... But a lot of older adults really do want to try new things,” Weiss explains. “Grocery retailers need to understand the opportunity for that.”

Grocery shopping, but make it fun

While grocery shopping is a chore for many people, younger consumers are

most likely to view it as downright boring. In a 2025 U.S. survey by market research firm YouGov, 40.5% of gen-Z respondents said grocery shopping is boring, compared to 33.6% of baby boomers and 37% overall. When younger consumers go to the supermarket, nearly 60% said they only buy what they need, compared to 45% of baby boomers.

To make shopping feel less like an errand, Mintel’s Gregoire suggests retailers reimagine stores as places where younger consumers can connect and socialize. “It doesn’t have to go as far as having an arcade or a game area, but the idea is to make it a desirable location, rather than just a chore for younger consumers,” he says.

PwC’s Swern echoes the opportunity for grocers to do more in-store, saying younger consumers still want to shop at physical stores. She points to the concept of “retail-tainment,” which can include everything from experiential events to interactive displays to help shoppers discover new products and learn new things. “How can grocers introduce a new product or a new region to educate consumers and just make it fun?” says Swern.

That kind of education fits right in with generation Z’s desire to know more about their food and where it comes from. “There is an opportunity to have more information about products because gen Z wants transparency,” says Swern. “They want to know the story behind the bottle of olive oil—it came from this region in Italy, [the olives were] picked by these people, it’s owned by this family—so they have the whole journey of the product.”

Community hubs for the socializing set

For older consumers, grocery stores as community hubs represent a significant opportunity. “In general, a lot of older adults are looking for ways to connect with other people. They want to have new relationships. And grocery retailers are a great place to facilitate that,” says Age of Majority’s Weiss. “They’re safe environments and older adults are going there all the time. So, you combine those two and there is a mutual benefit to the shopper and the retailer. You get them in your store to socialize and while they’re there, they’re going to shop.”

Weiss points to ideas such as themed

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cooking classes, lunch clubs, singles nights or even daytime games such as Mahjong (a Chinese tile game) as ways to bring older consumers in to socialize and shop. However, he cautions against using age-related language, particularly the dreaded 's' word. "As soon as you say this is for you because you're a senior, that's the kiss of death," he says. "It's more about designing and bringing forth new ideas and innovations with older adults in mind that can be beneficial for everyone."

Service that meets older customers where they are

Creating a friendly environment for older consumers also includes touches that make a tangible difference in ease and accessibility. Faigelman highlights wider, clutter-free aisles, clear signage and legible fonts as ways to make shopping easier and more enjoyable.

Personalized assistance is another must-have. "A staff member assisting with bagging groceries can be a reason that boomers will come back to the store," says Faigelman. "That human touch and being treated like a person is so valuable to this group."

PwC's Swern adds that while most grocers will help customers carry groceries to their cars if asked, it's not promoted in any big way. "It would be nice to see a sign that says, 'Can we help you take your groceries to your car?'"

Supporting older shoppers also means recognizing the challenges some face, such as dementia. In 2024, Vince's Market became one of the first businesses in Ontario's York Region to be certified dementia-friendly by the Alzheimer Society of York Region. Around 75% of employees at Vince's four stores are trained to identify and assist customers with dementia.

"It was key to understand what to look for and what to do in a situation," says Maria Ciarlandini, community support ambassador at Vince's Market. "For example, if someone walks into the store and they're wearing clothing that doesn't match the weather, that's a sign, or if they're at the cash and they're not sure what they're doing, that's another sign."

She adds that this knowledge is impactful for both customers and staff at Vince's. "Some of our team members are

going through it with family members ... so, there's a compassion component and it aligns with what we do as a company."

The training helps people living with dementia retain their independence, says Jaime Cruz, public education & community programs manager at the Alzheimer Society of York Region. "We don't want to stop people from going into the grocery store who are living with a cognitive impairment," Cruz says. "We want to create that quality of life. A diagnosis doesn't mean that individuals' lives stop; it's about how to adapt and meet their needs where they are."

Boomers' practical take on technology

Supporting older shoppers also means recognizing how they interact with technology. While many grocers are investing in online shopping platforms and mobile apps, these tools often miss the mark for older consumers.

"Most apps were not created with seniors in mind and the content doesn't feel like it's written for that audience," explains Faigelman. "Hyperlinks, buttons and drop-downs are difficult for older users. There's a bit of cognitive overload going on with boomers in the grocery space—there are just too many steps, and the virtual cart isn't appealing to a lot of them." She suggests grocers create a guide on how to use online ordering systems and put it in an e-mail or even on paper.

For older adults, technology also must serve a clear purpose. "Most of them aren't going to use technology just for the sake of using technology," says Weiss. "They want to see the practical application; for example, using AI to make the experience more personalized."

Grocers with loyalty programs are armed with the data to do this. "Personalized coupons, product recommendations, recipes based on what they've bought, ideas based on their health and dietary restrictions or goals. There's a lot of space there," Weiss says. "It will take some investment by the grocery retailers, but the more personalized you can make it ... the better the experience, the better the product selection, the better ideas for meals and recipes. I think there's a huge opportunity there."

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Immersive is the name of the game for generation Z and generation alpha

For younger consumers, of course, technology is a way of life. Mintel's Gregoire points out how platforms such as YouTube dominate the media habits of generation Z and generation alpha (born between 2010 to 2025). So, from a marketing standpoint, "If you want to reach younger consumers, note the only streaming service that saw any growth last year was YouTube," he says. "It's ubiquitous among this group."

Gamification adds a whole new dimension to socializing, Gregoire adds. "Roblox, for example, is an immersive world with sub-games, where kids chat on Facebook Messenger Kids while playing in real time. The idea of socialization has really changed."

For brands, the challenge is breaking through in these spaces. "When younger

consumers are on social media, they're less likely to interact with branded properties," says Gregoire. "Gen alpha responds more to live streams, personal stories from people online and influencers. It's not new to try to leverage influencers, but the way younger people consume information is a different information environment in terms of what are trusted sources. I don't think brands can underestimate that."

Walmart is one retailer that's answered the call. Last year, it launched an immersive shopping platform, Walmart Realm, in the United States. Targeted at gen-Z and gen-alpha consumers, the virtual platform lets users explore and shop themed digital storefronts curated by influencers, as well as play interactive mini games.

In a LinkedIn post, Justin Breton, Walmart's head of partnerships and emerging experiences, said the retailer

recently refreshed Realm in support of Walmart Delivers—mobile pop-ups (in real life) that feature photo booths, giveaways and interactive zones.

Though Realm focuses on beauty, home and fashion—not food—it shows what's possible. As Breton stated, "By blending cultural relevance, interactivity and delivery convenience, Walmart Realm and Walmart Delivers are redefining what it means to shop at Walmart." And no matter what consumers are into, he added, "We get it, we have it and we can deliver it. Who knew?"

Whether it's innovating for generation Z or being more supportive of boomers, the question for grocery retailers is, who's next? **CG**

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