



# Courting customers

The food-to-go category in forecourt stores continues to evolve to ensure it remains relevant to consumers. **Tracy West** reports

**T**he food-to-go category in the Forecourt Trader of the Year Awards is always a hotly contested one. Quality entries are sent from across the UK, showing different retailers' takes on eat-now food. Variety is key as pre-Covid consumers visiting the same stores on a regular basis demanded plenty of options. And variety is what Forecourt Trader's food-to-go award winner for 2020 – MFG Barnetby – provides in spades thanks to the addition of a food court. It's a compact version of what you would expect to find in a big shopping mall – lots of different offers packed together in one space, accompanied by a seating area.

MFG foodservice director, Paul Deary, says: "We wanted a food-to-go solution that had a very broad customer appeal,

across all day parts." That solution includes West Cornwall Pasties or freshly baked pastries for breakfast; fresh sandwiches prepared in-store for lunch; and Rollover hot dogs and warm nachos for dinner (or any time 24-hours a day if that's what customers want). And there's more, including Fwip gelato, F'real milkshakes, Skwishee ice slushies, Tango Ice Blast and a Tooty Frooty self-serve healthy snack offer. In addition, there are chilled ready meals and a microwave for any HGV drivers wanting to take a break.

The 200sq ft food court, which is set aside from the rest of the shop, features modern seating and lighting with sockets and USB chargers for customers. The self-contained area has dedicated staff who constantly monitor it for stock



**Country Choice's new Flatstone Pizza Co concept comes complete with step-by-step recipe cards that enable retailers to create any one of eight different options: Margherita; Pepperoni; BBQ Chicken; Meat Feast; Hawaiian Ham; Ham & Mushroom; Chicken & Pepperoni; and the Plant Lovers Pizza**

availability and cleanliness. Deary says they have received great feedback about the food court at MFG Barnetby from both new and regular customers.

"Many aspects/concepts have been and are being used in developments across the MFG estate but the exact range of brands on offer at each station is dependent on the station's location and customer audience," he explains. Deary says the food-to-go market has changed throughout the many stages of lockdown but as restrictions ease, he expects to see strong customer demand as people return to offices and daily commutes.

## PIZZA SUCCESS

Meanwhile another food-to-go brand making great headway in the forecourt sector

**FAST FACT**

**£24bn** Food-to go sales are set to reach more than £24bn by 2024 (IGD)

## Henderson Technology's Appetite for growth

Appetite, the home delivery, Click & Collect and hot food app, is proving very popular with Henderson Technology's customers. Darren Nickels, retail technology operations director at the company, says retailers are attracting new customers who have not shopped with them before thanks to the introduction of this new solution.

Appetite, created in partnership with Blu Dot Technologies, is fully integrated into Henderson Technology's EDGEPoS system meaning stock levels are live and automatically updated so the shopper has



the pick of what is actually on the shelves in real-time.

Nickels explains that retailers are fully supported with training and support teams which means the software, order

terminal and printer can all be installed with full stock uploaded and training completed in around two days.

Aaron McGuigan, manager of Mulkerns Eurospar, started

offering the Appetite app to allow customers to pre-order and pre-pay for their Sunday carvery dinners, of which the site serves around 700 every weekend.

He says: "Following

the outbreak of the pandemic, this service became essential for our customers as well as for our staff allowing for less queues and therefore fewer customers in-store while still

servicing all our community." The app worked so well that it has since been extended to the whole store. Says Aaron: "Since the launch we are now averaging over £5,000 per week of orders going through the app - and this is growing at a mammoth speed.

"We can offer our customers a consistent service allowing them to Click and Collect, picking a delivery slot or paying in-store with the groceries already picked by a member of our team.

"Appetite has been a massive success in-store, driven by our staff who update content regularly, maintaining live stock records."

⚡ (despite the Covid pandemic) is Stone Willy's Kitchen.

Stone Willy's director, Will Robinson, says: "Over the last 12 months we've been able to continue to open sites and have been averaging one a month. But what has changed in the past 12 months is the approach to how food to go is operated. Adding a food counter that needs to be operated by staff through all day parts - for up to 14 hours a day - is expensive and in some cases prohibitively so. From an operator perspective, Stone Willy's food can be prepared by just one person so it has been safe for staff to operate. Typically sites are dedicating just 40 hours per week of staffing and this allows all-day foodservice as food can be prepped in advance. From a customer perspective, the fact

everything is packaged (no food handled directly in front of the customer) and it's ready for immediate consumption with no queuing has helped some of our sites achieve incredible sales."

At award-winning Gardner Garages' Westacre Services in



Ashton Gardner says offering Deliveroo is good for business

Salisbury, they had a single bake-off option to which they added the Stone Willy's concept alongside F'Real milkshakes, slush and combined it all along one wall with Costa Coffee to create a great range that would keep their customers returning despite intense local competition. Operations director Ashton Gardner says: "Our food-to-go offer was central to our re-development and the sales have been way above our initial expectations."

Gardner Garages is using Deliveroo to deliver the Stone Willy's range direct to customers. Ashton explains: "We started offering the service during the first lockdown and it is going really well. Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays are our busiest days for deliveries and the amount people spend online versus

what they would if they'd come into the shop is much more. That's because they are at home scrolling through their phone, see something they fancy and just add it to their order. We hardly ever get any orders for less than £15 and we do lots of combos and deals to attract purchases."

Deliveroo takes quite a hefty commission from each order but Ashton says that has not been a problem: "We had to put our prices up on our Deliveroo menu to take that commission into account but I did a lot of research into pricing and our prices still look very reasonable."

When a Deliveroo order goes through to Westacre, their iPad beeps, staff review the order, accept it, then prepare it.

There are always cases in life where mistakes are made or where customers try to

**FAST FACT**

**24%** The percentage of Brits who are now ordering more deliveries and takeaways than before (GlobalData)

## Pizza success for Jos Richardson

Jos Richardson & Son Ltd's partnership with Chicago Town is going from strength to strength. The company has now successfully rolled out the self-serve pizza-to-go solution across five of its forecourt stores in the North, West and East Yorkshire.

Richard Cooper, senior brand manager at Chicago Town brand owner Dr Oetker, says: "The team at Jos Richardson & Son Ltd has shown just how simple and easy it is to offer their customers hot and fresh Chicago Town pizza to go. They have been brilliant and quickly recognised the value and power of offering a fully

branded self-serve pizza-to-go solution in their stores. The roll-out has been a huge success, evidenced by the positive customer feedback, impressive levels of sales and strong repeat purchase."

Neil Millett, area manager, Jos Richardson & Son Ltd, explains: "It's a simple self-serve solution that Chicago Town has put together which makes it very easy for our team to cook, bag and display. Our customers love the fact that we offer a variety of best-selling flavours from a big brand in quarter, half and even full pizzas. We're delighted and so are our customers, who keep coming back for more."

Chicago Town recently unveiled a new vegan pizza and a range of new equipment and display solutions including new quarter-slice bags and full boxes which can hold pizzas for up to three hours, helping to reduce waste.

Cooper continues: "The new solutions we have developed now make it easier than ever for retailers to make food to go a real destination in-store. With food to go set to reach £24.4bn by 2024, customers like Jos Richardson & Son Ltd are already benefiting with impressive sales of pizza to go and a higher spend per trip per customer compared to chilled food-to-go options."



pull a fast one by saying they haven't received everything they ordered but Ashton has this covered too: "We installed CCTV so we can clearly see everything that's put into the bag so if any mistakes are made we know. There can also be problems when the drivers take things and we sorted this by making sure every item is stickered down."

Ashton says Deliveroo has been good for business but says set-up is not quick and the fact that you have no personal contact with the company (with everything online) can be difficult but overall he would recommend it.

Robinson believes many forecourts within densely packed residential areas are well placed to partner up with a delivery app and not only offer food in the evening but throughout the day when many

of the takeaways are shut. "This is a great opportunity for shops to really add to their bottom line utilising what is already on site. MFG Hatton Cross initially struggled in the pandemic as a result of Heathrow Terminal Four shutting, which dramatically reduced traffic. But the ability to deliver both pizza and wraps through Stone Willy's and sandwiches through Subway has put sales above pre-pandemic levels."

Another satisfied Stone Willy's retailer is Katherine Batch, sales director at Sewell on the go. "We added Stone Willy's Kitchen into one of our sites to complement our existing food-to-go offer in January 2020. We did not have a huge amount of space to play with so added one of their hot towers to offer grab-and-go breakfast muffins, hot wraps

and pizza. Due to how busy it became, within six months we had to add an additional hot tower and second oven to cope with the demand. It has become one of the most profitable food-to-go concessions within our estate."

Finally, Robinson says there



Stone Willy's Kitchen is proving profitable for Sewell on the go

are three opportunities to make an impact on the customer with pos.

"Firstly outside, while they are filling up is the one time they will not have their phone in their hand. Make sure pump toppers or pavement signs with key meal deals and best sellers are placed around here. Secondly, as the customer walks in make sure the food to go is visible before the customer gets in the queue to pay. Ideally near the coffee where they will be standing for at least 40 seconds while their drink pours – if the food is within arm's reach and is well presented it is so much harder to resist.

"Finally, give the customer an incentive to come back – a loyalty card with a few stamps on it sets the customer well on their way to becoming a regular purchaser."