

Healthy food vending machines offer fresh, paleo, gluten-free options

October 14 2015, by Niki Widdowson

We normally don't associate vending machines with healthy food choices but new businesses are seeking to change our minds.

QUT consumer behaviour expert Gary Mortimer said that while many consumers still associated vending machines with sugary snacks, salty foods and fizzy drinks, things are starting to change.

"Companies like Melbourne based Füd Revolution and Brisbane's All Real Food are leading the way in providing healthy alternatives to time-poor consumers," Dr Mortimer said.

"In the past five years, we have seen significant growth in the 'fresh prepared foods' segment and supermarkets have been quick to respond, offering fresh, semi-prepared choices.

"Australians are now more focused than ever on sugar consumption, trans-fats, childhood obesity and BMI indexes, and as such their shopping behaviour has changed.

"These machines dispense healthy choices such as freshly prepared salads, falafels, free-range boiled eggs, seeds, chopped fruit and yoghurts, to give busy office workers and commuters fast, fresh and convenient options as well as paleo, gluten-free, vegan, sugar-free choices."

Dr Mortimer said US research consultancy firm A.T. Kearney had

forecasted sales in the US\$26 billion fresh prepared foods segment would grow at 6-7 per cent through to 2017.

"This is up from its 5-6 per cent in the 2007 to 2012 period. This growth will outpace the anticipated 2-3 per cent in retail grocery food and beverage," he said.

"These healthy 'vending machines' are a great example of innovative and entrepreneurial firms responding to consumer behaviour changes.

"We should expect to see these vending machines popping up in office tower foyers, train station platforms, transit hubs, gyms and campuses around Australia."

Dr Mortimer said the vending machines' design tapped into the psyche of health-conscious consumers.

"Gone are the big flashy, brightly lit machines - in their place are machines with earthy, warm colours and recycled timber facades," he said.

"It is vitally important for businesses attempting to capture the health conscious, time-poor consumer to use materials that portray rustic, authentic and artisan messages and as well sustainable, re-usable packaging.

"Placing fresh salads in non-recyclable containers and selling them from oversized ostentatious machines, simply sends the wrong messages.

"Further pushing their social agenda, most companies distribute unsold inventory at the end of the day to charity groups and the homeless."

He said to further improve convenience, the machines offered pay pass,

tap and go technology to enable hungry consumers to grab a quick 'healthy' fix, without the need for loose change.

"I would certainly expect to see further extensions to these types of [vending machines](#) once the 'fresh' message has been established," he said.

"We can expect to see fresh Vietnamese rolls, sushi, sandwiches and even heated options, like soup and Asian inspired laksas.

"I see no limit to what might be offered."

While the healthy vending machine channel is predicted to grow, such food options were sensitive to local demographics, Dr Mortimer said.

"I think there will always be a place for vending [machines](#) with energy drinks, salty snacks and sweet treats."

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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