Cookies, candy and ice cream are classic childhood snacks. Because consumers often see snacks as treats, it’s no surprise that sweet varieties remain consumer favorites as they age. However, with the changing definition of snacking and an awareness of health moving to the forefront, sweet snacks have evolved on restaurant menus. Operators need to find the sweet spot—pun intended—in order to compete for share of this uber-appealing snack type.

**The Sweet Spot**

Consumers find sweet snacks more appealing than all other snack types, including better-for-you snacks, regional Hispanic snacks, snackified entrees, breakfast snacks, late-night snacks and plant-based protein snacks. Almost three-quarters of consumers (74%) find sweet snacks appealing, with 36% saying they find them very appealing. Those ages 25-34 are the most likely to find sweet snacks alluring, with 82% agreeing. Other skews are for women (76%), millennials (81%), Westerners (76%) and those with a mixed ethnic background (91%).
People are most (and equally) likely to consume sweet snacks in the afternoon and evening. These times of day both skew the greatest for those ages 35-44, with 76% likely to eat sweet snacks in the afternoon and 78% selecting sweet snacks in the evening. Late-night consumption of sweet snacks follows afternoon and evening at 61%, trailed by morning at 47%. Fewer consumers would eat a sweet snack as a meal replacement (37%), which is actually a lower percentage than every other snack type surveyed.

Accordingly, operators should promote sweet snacks as an actual snack instead of as a meal replacement. When it comes to whether they should promote in the afternoon or the evening, here are some demographic breakouts that may help the decision:

- Women, more than men, and Westerners, more than those in any other region, are more likely to eat sweet snacks in both the afternoon and evening.
- Gen Xers are the most likely to eat sweet snacks in the afternoon, while millennials are the most likely to eat them in the evening.
- Those with a mixed ethnic background are more likely than those of other ethnicities to eat sweet snacks in the afternoon, whereas Hispanics are the most likely to eat them in the evening.

Despite the fact that consumers find sweet snacks more appealing than all other snack types, the percentage of consumers who say they would like to see added sweet snacks on restaurant menus is lower than all other snack types. Just 46% of consumers would like to see more sweet snacks at restaurants, though skews are greater for 25- to 35-year-olds (61%) and Hispanics (62%).

Thus, either consumers believe restaurants already offer a sufficient amount of sweet snacks on their menus, or they would prefer to see other snack types. Here are some possible explanations for the latter and how operators may combat these reasonings if they would like to continue offering sweet snacks.
Perhaps... Your customers prefer savory snacks.

Combat this by offering sweet-savory combo snacks!

Some 57% of consumers say they enjoy sweet-savory flavor combos in snacks, skewing the greatest for 35- to 44-year-olds (70%). Consider adding sweet flavors to traditional savory snacks, or savory flavors to traditional sweet snacks.

**ON THE MENU:**
California-based Rosamunde Sausage Grill offers about 15 sausage varieties, but often pairs them with sweeter ingredients; some sweet-savory combos include chicken with cherry, wild boar with apples and cranberries, and a sausage with mango chutney.

Perhaps... Your customers see sweet snacks as unhealthy.

Combat this by offering better-for-you sweet snacks!

Operators can use quality cues like fresh, natural and real as well as fruits or other healthful ingredients to add a better-for-you halo around sweet snacks. Plus, many healthy ingredients are innately sweet, such as acai, cacao and strawberry, which is a double bonus for operators looking to menu better-for-you sweet snacks.

**ON THE MENU:**
Dunkin’ Donuts’ Multigrain Instant Oatmeal uses multigrain oats, real brown sugar, dried fruit and other natural flavors to give this sweet snack a better-for-you slant.

Perhaps... Your customers see sweet snacks as too filling.

Combat this by offering mini or shareable sweet snacks!

Mini snacks are perfect for limited-service operations, which appeal to customers who want a sweet treat on the go without the heavy indulgence. For full serves, consider offering a sweets sampler platter so consumers can share indulgent treats with friends or family.

**ON THE MENU:**
Wow Bao menus single-serve bao in sweet varieties, including coconut custard and chocolate.
Sweet Snack Preferences

When it comes to sweet snacks that consumers purchase most often, the classics rule. Ice cream and cookies lead, with about three-quarters of consumers saying they purchase these types of sweet snacks at least once every 90 days. Not all demographics agree on their favorites, however. Here are some notable demographic variances in sweet snack preferences:

- Women are more likely than men to purchase all sweet snack varieties, with the exception of pie (39% of men, compared to 36% of women).
- Ice cream is the favorite of every generation except millennials: 77% prefer cookies, while just 71% enjoy ice cream.
- Ice cream is also the favorite of every ethnicity with the exception of Hispanics and those with a mixed ethnic background, both of whom prefer cookies.
- After cookies and brownies, the second runner-up is a tossup among various age groups: candy for consumers ages 18 to 24 and those 45 and older; cupcakes for 25- to 34-year-olds; and equally cake and candy for 35- to 44-year-olds.
- Hispanics (37%), mixed ethnic background (36%), and Asian (22%) consumers all are more likely to purchase ethnic desserts, such as churros, than black/African-American (15%) or Caucasian (13%) consumers.

Top Sweet Snacks Purchased Occasionally

(once every 90 days)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sweet Snack</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ice cream</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cookies</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candy</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brownies</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cake</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cupcake</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pie</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frozen yogurt</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jell-O/ pudding</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic dessert</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 1,000 consumers ages 16+
FEATURED RECIPE:

Sugar Cookie Canapes

Turn small cookies upside down, top with a swirl of frosting then decorate with fruit, nuts or sprinkles
TECHNOMIC TAKEAWAY:

3 Areas of Opportunity for Sweet Snacks

1 Sweet Flavor Combos

When it comes to flavor combinations, sweet flavors make the best pairings. According to Technomic’s 2017 Flavor Consumer Trend Report, powered by Ignite, the most appealing flavor combinations are sweet and savory (53%), sweet and sour (51%), and sweet and smoky (51%). Thus, operators should consider pairing sweet snacks with varied flavor notes, such as savory or spicy, to appeal to folks looking to vary their sweet treat orders.

2 Give Sweet Snacks a Health Halo

Better-for-you snacks trail sweet snacks as the most appealing snack types. So it’s safe to say, those who avoid sweet snacks likely do so because they see them as unhealthy. Operators should find ways to offer sweet snacks that appeal to health-conscious consumers. For example, a yogurt parfait with real fruit, low-fat granola and reduced-sugar strawberry preserves is a sweet snack that features real, fresh ingredients with reduced sugar and fat.

3 Classic Mix (or Mash) Up

Sweet snacks are the most appealing snack variety among consumers. Classic sweets such as ice cream and cookies reign, so operators should get creative by featuring mashups of some of the classic sweets. Consider topping cupcakes with candy pieces or putting cookie dough in ice cream.

Stay tuned for our forthcoming issues on:
- The fourth meal
- Plant-based protein snacks
- Snacking at commercial