

## What's For 'Linner'?

Shouldn't the combination of lunch and dinner be labeled "linner?" That's a question comedian Jerry Seinfeld once asked. Whatever c-stores call today's increasingly common mix of meals and snacks throughout the day and evening, the trend offers expanded opportunities for foodservice sales.

### NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Arlene Spiegel, owner of Arlene Spiegel & Associates, a restaurant, retail and foodservice consulting firm, agreed that the way to persuade customers to spend more on prepared foods is to make sure to merchandise them well in the store.

"Someone on the way to a late afternoon or early evening class or coming home from a workout at the gym might stop by for a cold beverage and see a freshly-prepared salad or sushi that looks particularly appetizing," she said.

Food should always be in front of the store, but not so close that customers will walk by the display without seeing it. The optimal positioning should be about two or three feet into the store, she said. An umbrella or awning over the foodservice area can also be an eye-catcher, she said.

### FRESH FOCUS

Emphasizing freshness is particularly important for convenience stores since consumers still don't necessarily equate pre-made with healthful, said Spiegel. That doesn't mean a chain featuring grab-and-go fare can't establish itself as a destination for quality and freshness.

Spiegel pointed to the Pret A Manger quick-service restaurant chain, based in the UK, as a model of product quality, packaging, merchandising and

branding that c-stores would do well to study and emulate. "Even the soups, juices and teas are beautifully packaged," Spiegel said.

Pret A Manger doesn't have its own commissary, Spiegel continued. Instead the retailer outsources its products to suppliers who provide twice-daily delivery. "There's nothing wrong with outsourcing or partnering with an established foodservice brand as long as the focus is on quality and freshness," Spiegel said. "Convenience stores have to brand themselves as legitimate restaurant options without losing sight of their original mission and sales driver, convenience."

Among c-stores, she feels that Sheetz has discovered just the right balance. "Sheetz is committed to foodservice and does it brilliantly," Spiegel said. "They're real competition for local restaurants while still maintaining the product mix and convenience that is the basis of their business. After all, she said, how many restaurants make it possible for customers to pick up a dozen eggs, a quart of milk or a bottle of wine with their dinner."

