

Roadside Catering - UK - July 2010

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What is this report about?

Despite the inroads made by the increased role of brands at Motorway Service Areas (MSAs), the market remains dogged by consumers' preconceived ideas of the high prices, poor quality and overall poor value for money available, the latter being particularly significant during a period of economic instability.

The performance of the MSA market has varied as it has been impacted by the recent fluctuations in domestic tourism trends. Overall consumer use of MSAs continues to be of a relatively short and unplanned duration, which is a problem in a busy marketplace where consumers aren't necessarily a captive audience and alternative MSAs are often close by.

What have we found out?

- During the recession, increased competition from petrol station forecourts, which are well placed to tap into the trend for convenience and lower sales value purchases, has impacted sales growth.
- One way in which motorway service areas (MSAs) can differentiate themselves from the generic offer of snacks and confectionery available at petrol stations is through stocking a range of more innovative and imaginative snacking products such as those found at sandwich retailer EAT.
- Perception continues to be MSAs' biggest issue with a fifth of consumers believing that the food/drink offered at these sites is poor both in range and quality.
- MSAs can exploit the fact that 4 in 10 people already stop at them for food and drink and develop their role as part of the travelling 'experience' by introducing a range of affordable luxuries and treats such as a 'car picnic' of teas/coffees and afternoon tea to takeaway.
- Fast service is the key criteria for consumers stopping at MSAs for food and drink, as highlighted by the fact that coffee shops are the most popular foodservice outlets used. MSAs looking to tap into this trend should look to partner with other made to order service propositions such as ice cream and smoothie bars.
- The proposed "eco" MSA at Matson on the M5 suggests one way in which operators could harness consumer interest in local and green issues through more sympathetic landscaping and a food offer including home made, organic and local foods.

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