"The dreaded question “what’s for dinner?” is one that some 88% of Canadians are responsible for addressing during the week. While the large majority plan ahead for weeknight dinners, only about half are successful in seeing their plans through, meaning that there is a need for more immediate solutions to help them get to the finish line."

- Carol Wong-Li, Associate Director - Lifestyles & Leisure

This report looks at the following areas:

- Planning ahead too far doesn’t pay off
- The need for shortcuts is real but Canadians want to feel involved
- Grocery stores come into the meal planning game too late in consumers’ minds

Consumers don’t want to feel like they’re cheating and crave shortcut offerings that let them stay involved in the cooking process – a concept undoubtedly contributing to the success of time-saving small kitchen appliances. As meals cannot be made without first buying the ingredients, grocery stores are a key player in the meal planning and preparation process, yet consumers don’t think of grocery stores as a primary source for meal ideas, meaning that grocery stores are missing out in the pre-work of planning.
Meal Planning & Preparation - Canada - January 2020

Overview

What you need to know

Executive Summary

The insights

Planning ahead too far doesn't pay off

Figure 1: Frequency of cooking planned meals, deciding what to cook last minute, and ordering in or going out for a meal, November 2019

The need for shortcuts is real but Canadians want to feel involved

Figure 2: Select attitudes towards meal planning and making prepared meals (% agree), November 2019

Grocery stores come into the meal planning game too late in consumers' minds

Figure 3: Attitudes towards grocery retailers and meal ideas, November 2019

The opportunities

Adoption of small kitchen appliances remains a fresh opportunity amongst moms

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Quick means quick in Quebec thanks to a different orientation towards eating

Figure 5: Cooking involvement level for preparing weekday meals at least once a week (NET), Quebec vs overall, November 2019

Click-and-collect of raw ingredients is a good way to attract suburbanites

Figure 6: Cooking involvement level for preparing weekday meals at least once a week (NET), suburban vs urban, November 2019

What it means

The Market – What You Need to Know

Time pressures are cooking Canadians

Planning and prep solutions need to mature with an aging population

Tighter financial times will drive more to cook at home

Market Factors

Time pressures are real

Work days are getting longer

More parents, led by moms, are working full-time

Figure 7: Employment status of couple families with at least one child aged under 16, 1976 and 2015

Commutes are getting longer for working Canadians

Canadians have a positive mindset but feel the squeeze

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The double shift still exists for moms and meal prep is a top challenge

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More range in meal planning and prep solutions needed as Canada ages

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Shifting demographics mean more marketing opportunities for meal prep-related companies

Economic factors will foster more focus on home cooking

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Home-based options will be more attractive thanks to rising food prices
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Key Players – What You Need to Know

Printed cookbooks have staying power
The Instant Pot continues to win
The emotions associated with cooking and planning are at odds
Canadians cook what they know; this is a challenge for ‘new’ solutions
Opportunity exists to give centre of store a refresh
Tech finds a way to lend an actual helping hand

What’s Cooking?

Printed cookbooks continue to remain a staple resource
Canadian women continue to turn to printed cookbooks
Figure 14: Sources for meal ideas, by gender, November 2019

Influencers continue to use cookbooks as part of their marketing mix
Figure 15: What’s Gaby Cooking Instagram post, January 2020
Figure 16: Chrissy Teigen Instagram post, December 2019
Figure 17: Welcome!, November 2019

Cookbooks are connecting with home cooks of all ages
Fool-proof kitchen appliances are winning – starring the Instant Pot
Instant Pot’s impact on the small kitchen appliances segment is being felt
Figure 18: Instant Pot Instagram post, January 2020

Success lies in reducing tasks…
Figure 19: Instant Pot Tuscan Chicken and Rice, November 2018

…as well as allowing for multitasking
Figure 20: Instant Pot Smart WiFi – Getting to Know Your Smart WiFi, November 2018

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Cooking vs planning, it’s a bit of a love-hate relationship
Figure 21: Emotional aspects associated with cooking (% agree), September 2018
Figure 22: ‘Meal planning is stressful’ (% agree), 18-34s and parents with under-18s at home vs overall, November 2019

Consider partnerships with already existing apps that work with what they have
A note on meal kits: yes, there’s opportunity, but adoption is low
Figure 23: Meal kit usage and intent, May 2018

Canadian home cooks tend to be creatures of comfort
Figure 24: Preference for cooking with familiar recipes and usage of same seasonings/spices (% agree), by cooking segments, September 2018

Consider ways to make the ‘new’ a little more familiar and accessible
Giving the centre-of-store items a fresh take
The image of shelf-stable or frozen foods is a bit stale

Refresh the image by positioning these as go-to pantry staples
Give it a fresh spin by showcasing how these can address broader concerns

What’s Next?

Connected appliances get their ‘hands’ dirty
Food resources are also going the way of subscription models

The Consumer – What You Need to Know

Weeknight dinners are the responsibility of nine in 10 Canadians
Plans turn into reality when consumers have more context

Feeding kids comes with its own unique challenges
The magic ingredient for shortcuts is involvement

Grocery stores are underrated as a resource by consumers

Planning and Cooking Responsibility

Nine in 10 Canadians partake in cooking weeknight dinners

Mothers continue to bear the responsibility of making weekday meals

Much potential to boost traction of cooking appliances that reduce cooking steps

Team up for success: grocery retailers and time-saving kitchen appliances

Gains to be had by targeting men 25-34 as they are at a transition point

The likelihood to hold cooking responsibility jumps at 25-34

Lack of cooking skills translates into lesser adoption of behaviours

Grocery retailers stand to gain by focusing more attention on this segment
Planning vs Cooking Weeknight Meals

Closer proximity of planning translates into greater likelihood of actualization

Canadians plan ahead for weeknight meals, but not too far

Figure 46: Meal planning timing, November 2019

Those who plan ‘a day or two ahead’ see greater success actualizing planned meals

Figure 47: Frequency of cooking planned meals, deciding what to cook last minute, and ordering in or going out for a meal, November 2019

Figure 48: ‘Cook a meal that you planned ahead of time’ at least once a week, by meal planning timing, November 2019

Context dictates success; consider developing campaigns that call this out

Context opens up opportunities for shelf-stable staples – ie the centre of the store

There’s an opportunity to tap into environmental concerns with frozen foods

Boomer women: plan the morning of and follow through

Figure 49: ‘Cook a meal that you planned ahead of time’ at least once a week, women 55+ vs overall, November 2019

Figure 50: ‘Cook a meal that you planned ahead of time’ at least once a week (net), women 55+ vs overall, November 2019

Inspiring Boomer women: spark ‘fresh’ ideas by raising attention of ‘old’ favourites

Figure 51: Select factors considered when planning meals, women 55+ vs overall, November 2019

Figure 52: Epicurious Instagram post, January 2020

Figure 53: NYT Cooking Instagram post, January 2020

Cooking Involvement Level and Usage of Shortcuts

Shortcuts are a reality for many during the course of the week...

Figure 54: Cooking involvement level for preparing weeknight meals, November 2019

...though shortcuts are necessary, four in five still want to feel involved

Figure 55: Select attitudes towards meal planning and making prepared meals (% agree), November 2019

The secret ingredient to mealtime shortcuts is ‘contribution’

Figure 56: Bon Appétit Instagram post, January 2020

Quebecers are all in or not, there’s no middle ground

Figure 57: Cooking involvement level for preparing weeknight meals at least once a week (NET), Quebec vs overall, November 2019

Consider promoting complete meals in frozen formats to appeal to Quebecers

Figure 58: Your Holiday Headquarters – Let’s Celebrate Together #preparedwithcare, December 2019

Figure 59: Beef Pot Roast 2019 #preparedwithcare, September 2019

Also, emotional orientation of eating and cooking differs for Quebecers

Figure 60: Select attitudes towards meal planning (% agree), Quebec vs overall, November 2019

Connect by showing connections to people first, then to the food

Figure 61: 90,000 Holiday Meals, November 2019
Surprise! Suburbanites more inclined to use shortcuts than urbanites

Grocery retailers stand to gain from promoting click-and-collect of raw ingredients

Chinese Canadians see prepared meals as part of the plan

Partnerships between foodservice providers and grocery retailers will appeal

Meal Planning and Grocery Stores

Grocery stores are missing out in the ideation process for meals

More needs to be done to get consumers thinking about them beforehand

Interactive resources may see more traction than static ones

Grocery store organization a pain point for younger consumers

Consider emulating the BPC sector to freshen things up and lend a helping hand

Deep Dive on Parents: Additional Challenges

Parents have more (pickly) tastes to consider

Unsurprisingly, children’s opinions are a factor

Mothers have more work, but aren’t keen on shortcuts – except appliances

More virtual support will win over moms as they’re multitasking

More mobile capabilities will count

Appendix – Data Sources and Abbreviations

Data sources
Consumer survey data
Consumer qualitative research
Abbreviations
Terms