

# SNACK ATTACK

## Employers, Vendors Prioritize Healthy Options

The days of the “Wheels of Death” may be numbered.

That is what employees at Taghleef Industries, a facility in Rosedale in Parke County that produces packaging films for a variety of products, nicknamed the traditional vending machines (offering sodas, potato chips and candy bars) that used to line the halls of the plant.

“We don’t have cafeteria services for our employees, who work 12-hour shifts, and we are a rural plant about 20 minutes away from any restaurants,” explains Linda LeCour, health and wellness manager-North America. “Up until last summer, employees would either bring food that would last a full shift or they were forced to use the vending machines.”

The company has since shifted to a micro-market concept, the newest innovation in vending as the emphasis on workplace wellness continues to grow. It’s a hybrid between a vending machine and a convenience store. Vendors provide fresher, healthier options like salads and sandwiches in a kiosk, while consumers can read the food nutrition label on an item before purchasing it.

“No matter how hard you try, it’s next to impossible to sell a banana from a vending machine,” proclaims Kyle West, general manager at Fox Canteen, a Canteen Vending franchise that installed Taghleef Industries’ micro-market. “The fluorescent lights in the machine would make the peel not look so great and they wouldn’t fit into the carousel-style machines. It just didn’t work, but with the micro market it works very well.”

### 21st century vending

Canteen Vending’s version of the micro-market concept is called Avenue C. The set-up can offer between 400 and 700 snack, beverage and fresh food options in a retail space that’s customizable for almost any workplace with a recommended minimum of 200 to 250 employees.

Employees choose items from the shelves, self-scan at a kiosk and pay with a credit card.

Canteen’s Fresh Food Program supplies the perishable items that go in the Avenue C kiosks. Green Bay, Wisconsin is home to a Canteen culinary center that produces about 250,000 sandwiches delivered to franchisees every night. To maintain variety, it rotates 600-plus items on a daily basis.

John Whitlock is a project analyst with Compass Group North America, which owns Canteen Vending. Operating out of Lafayette, he covers mid-central Indiana and currently has 23 clients utilizing Avenue C in his region.

“Avenue C is growing at a pace that’s hard to keep up with,” Whitlock declares. “In the past eight months, (mid-central Indiana) has had just shy of 100% growth. The projection between now and October 1, the end of our fiscal year, will be close to an additional 50% growth.”

Fox Canteen has 12 Avenue C stores in Vigo County and is slated to open two in Hendricks County by the end of the year. It’s about a six- to eight-week process from the

time the contract is signed to install the market; right now the company is installing one or two per quarter.

Another player in this field is San Diego-based Fresh Healthy Vending, which has three franchisees in Central Indiana. Founder and chairman Nick Yates launched the world’s first healthy vending company in Australia in 2002 and brought the concept to America in 2006.

He started his business with healthy packaged food and drinks, evolved to add perishables like smoothies and fruit cups, and now has the technology to offer salads, wraps and even Paleo Diet meals in a micro-market.

But there’s room for even more innovation.

“When you can just walk in, grab something, not have to worry about pressing any buttons and it automatically gets charged to your mobile phone or credit card without any effort at all – I think that’s the end game for this business,” Yates notes.

Eskenazi Health is taking a different approach to vending as well. In 2010, the organization invested in its own vending machines and seized control over the products it sold to employees, patients and guests.

“We really want food that provides quality on all nutritional fronts,” emphasizes culinary nutrition specialist and registered dietician Margie Fougerson. “In our procurement policy, we require our two snack distributors to provide a complete nutrition breakdown of the items so we know that before we begin to order.”

### Making it work

Creating a healthy snacking culture that employees appreciate is



San Diego-based Fresh Healthy Vending founder and chairman Nick Yates is responsible for the placement of more than 5,000 healthy vending machines across the U.S. and Australia.

key. These are some of the best practices Eskenazi Health, Taghleef Industries, Aramark and Canteen Vending utilize:

- **Outline nutritional standards.** “Set up a procurement policy that clearly outlines what your nutrition standards are for vending. In that policy, be clear that the vendors need to provide the complete nutrition breakdown of those items so there’s a lot of transparency about what you’re purchasing and so you can stand behind those products in the vending machines,” Fougeron states.

Toyota Motor Manufacturing, Indiana, Inc. (TMMI) developed nutrition guidelines with its vendor, Aramark. Leon Herm, Aramark general manager at the TMMI plant, says at least 40% of each vending machine must contain healthier options.

- **Retain the element of choice.** “Our goal is to treat people like adults and let them make decisions, not necessarily just wipe out any product that’s not within the healthy standard,” LeCour notes. “We’re saying, ‘Here’s your healthier choices (and) here’s some that aren’t so healthy if you want to incorporate that into your overall food choices for the day.’”
- **Offer incentives.** West works with several clients that have set up programs where Canteen offers a lower price for healthy options to employees and the employer reimburses them to make up the difference.

## Culture shift

Yates recalls that the first school nutrition show he attended in 2007 was sponsored by Pepsi. His company has contacted hospitals across the country that have soda machines lining the walls of the heart ward.

Vendors and employers see evidence of change.

LeCour tells a story of an employee who came into her office, playfully pointing a finger at her saying, “It’s all your fault! You need to see what everyone is bringing to our birthday parties now.”

In addition to some sweet treats, the table was covered with fruits, vegetables and other healthy foods.

At Eskenazi Health, the salad bar now accounts for 20% of total sales in the on-site marketplace and café. There are no fryers on the premises since moving to the new location – and retail sales have doubled.

“That is what people are liking to eat at work, a great salad with some healthy toppings, and we’re really proud of those numbers,” remarks director of food and nutrition Thomas Thaman. “You really understand your consumer acceptance when you see it run up at the registers.”

Whitlock expects this trend to continue with the current national focus on youth wellness.

“We’re creating a new kind of consumer,” he concludes. “We (Compass Group) also handle university settings and without making any real effort, the healthier options sell much better on campuses. The younger generation is already starting to snack healthier.”

**RESOURCES:** Margie Fougeron and Thomas Thaman, Eskenazi Health, at [www.eskenazihealth.edu](http://www.eskenazihealth.edu) | Leon Herm, Aramark, at [www.aramark.com](http://www.aramark.com) | Linda LeCour, Taghleef Industries, at [www.ti-films.com](http://www.ti-films.com) | Kyle West, Fox Canteen, at [www.foxcanteen.com](http://www.foxcanteen.com) | John Whitlock, Compass Group North America, at [www.compass-usa.com](http://www.compass-usa.com) | Nick Yates, Fresh Healthy Vending, at [www.freshvending.com](http://www.freshvending.com)



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