

Key Trends Shaping How and What We Eat



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In conjunction with their latest book, futurists **Marian Salzman**, executive vice president, chief marketing officer of **JWT Worldwide**, and Ira Matathia, managing partner of brand consultancy NoFormula, pinpoint key trends shaping how and what we eat.

Matathia, co-author of *Next Now* (Palgrave Macmillan, December 26), notes that today more than ever, we are what we eat. “However the thought is served up—plain and unadorned or garnished with wit—‘You are what you eat’ is proving true on many levels,” says Matathia. “On the most superficial level, people have always identified other nationalities with distinctive foods. On a deeper level, cultures are often strongly influenced by their predominant food. We now understand that ‘You are what you eat’ applies at a cellular level as well.”

Another theme in food is what the authors term “gastroporn.” “It’s one of the ironies of modern life that cooking shows and books are so hugely popular when much of the time we eat on the move or settle down in front of the TV with a microwaved frozen dinner,” says Salzman. “The preparing, cooking, tasting and eating of food have become voyeuristic pleasures separated from physical reality.” Among the other emerging trends outlined in *Next Now*:

Personalized Diets: The demise of one-note diets is inevitable. We’ve seen

a backlash against Atkins as people re-embrace healthy carbs and start to query any diet that suggests butter, cream and unlimited red meat are the smart way to eat. Beyond that, there’s a growing belief that there’s no such thing as a diet that’s right for everyone. Personalization—whether based on lifestyle, ethnicity, blood type or something else—will become an important component of diet programs.

New Delicacies: Foods unfamiliar to everyday shoppers, like Greek yogurt, jicama from Mexico, Japanese sushi rice and Portuguese peri-peri sauces, will be front and center in the gourmet groceries that spring up in newly developed areas. Here, trendy shoppers will visit tasting bars and attend cooking classes. The continent most likely to emerge as hot in such shops? Asia. Watch also for African specialties like *injera*, the soft Ethiopian bread that also serves as an eating utensil.

Organic Grazing: The days of sitting at a table and lingering over three square meals are long gone for most people. Modern lifestyles mean fragmented schedules with meals eaten on the run. In response, the snacking and grazing culture is growing. Organic snack-food sales increased 30 percent in 2003, making snacks the second-fastest-growing organic segment after meat and poultry, according to a survey for the Organic Trade Association.

Global Gastronomy Meets the Mainstream: As we travel more expansively and watch more food shows that introduce us to international cooking, our tastes are going global. The proverbial melting pot is giving way to a literal stew of new flavors and tastes. Watch as more packaged and frozen ethnic meals mingle with frozen fries and pizza.

New Emphasis on Local and Fresh: “Organic” has been the focus of some of the most nutritionally aware for the last two or three decades, but now it’s moving into the mainstream. So today’s leading-edge consumers are turning their attention to local sourcing. Buying products locally is increasingly seen as one of the best ways to ensure that one’s food is truly fresh—picked not long before consumption.

The War for Young Palates: In virtually every country in which convenience foods and sugary snacks and soft drinks are sold—that is, in most developed countries and many developing countries, too—the war for young palates is shaping up to be long and hard fought. Children can be picky eaters, but they love food that’s sweet, brightly colored, presented in fun formats and marketed with fun advertising. Plus, they are masters of pester power. In the short term, this means easy feeding for parents and irresistible profits for food marketers; in the longer term, it means heavy costs for treating the effects of obesity, such as diabetes. And so the clamor is growing to regulate junk-food marketing aimed at children. Will we see other nations adopt the U.K. policy of tight restrictions on advertising to kids?

Premium-Drink Bars: As premium and super-premium spirits gain widespread appeal and acceptance, especially among younger people, bars will pop up to promote various brands, serving only one spirit and organized around the experience of that drink and its mixers. They’ll be short-lived but have serious talkability while they’re on the scene.