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# Trends to Watch for in 2019: Independent retailers are in a good position to advance

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Some key industry and consumer trends from 2018 will take on even bigger importance in 2019. Getting ahead of these trends will be essential for all industry players, especially independent supermarket operators. They need to be aware of these developments and the big stakes involved.

Here are five trends that should be on the radar of independent grocers in 2019.



An attractive, well-stocked produce display from the independent grocer Newport Avenue Market, based in Bend, OR.

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**1. Gen Z comes of age:** This generation, often defined as consumers born between the mid-1990s and 2012 — is still up for grabs. While they mirror millennial behaviors in some ways, this group also has its own unique identity. Independents will need to understand what it takes to connect with these younger consumers, including with enhanced variety and digital experiences. For example, Gen Zers are more comfortable receiving advertisements through their social media based on their activity and interests. This provides retailers with an opportunity to expand digital advertising that can be specially targeted to increase sales. Retailers that gain the trust and loyalty of these shoppers will be in a stronger position for many years to come.

**2. Transparency progresses:** The need for transparency is not a temporary development. It's a long-term trend and consumers are demanding more information. Embracing transparency will be essential for retailers to maintain and grow trust. Shoppers are interested not only in learning more about product ingredients, but also in attributes such as sourcing. Independents are already among the most trusted retailers, so transparency is a good way to further grow that bond with shoppers.

**3. E-commerce evolves:** E-commerce is often viewed as a threat to traditional retailers, but it's also an opportunity. Independents are beginning to make progress with a range of e-commerce models, and they need to understand that success with customers lies in employing a balanced approach to in-store and online strategies. Independents don't need to make the largest e-commerce investments in the industry. However, they do need to determine which strategies will be most important for customer convenience. For example, fresh is where independents can differentiate themselves in a crowded e-commerce field by excelling in the category, especially with produce.

**4. Wellness soars:** Health is a big topic with consumers. Everyone is more aware as health costs soar. Retailers need to have the right products for customers, but just as important is the ability to provide guidance. This is needed in areas of the store that include packaged foods, the perimeter, and the pharmacy. Independents, known for their differentiated service, have what it takes to offer products and guidance that differentiate from competitors.

**5. Consolidation advances:** The consolidation of retailers can lead to dilution of the unique aspects that defined their individual successes in the first place. That underscores the importance of independents as the retailers that maintain high standards and unique local approaches. Customers seeking local offerings are likely to look to independents more.

These trends should be on retailers' radars. They will need to determine the best investments to make in coming years, which isn't easy in an industry heading in so many new directions. These are difficult decisions, but independents are up to the task. They can position themselves as the retail segment that understands shopper needs and is willing to prove it.

*(Peter Larkin is president and chief executive officer of the National Grocers Association)*

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