

# Packaging solutions for retail bakeries



Image courtesy of Kwik Lok

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A growing number of retail bakeries are striving to accelerate the growth of their business during challenging times. To support these efforts, more are turning to packaging solutions that help them drive innovation and improve product quality and performance.

For bakeries producing as little as a dozen loaves a day to hundreds daily, automated solutions exist that will enhance productivity and boost profits.

“That’s what we specialize in,” notes Don Carrell, chief executive officer of Kwik Lok. “A small bakery looking for transition to growth needs solutions to speed up that process. They need tools to take the cycle times out of their operation.”



Karen Reed, director of marketing and communications for Kwik Lok, identifies there are a number of solutions that smaller bakeries are seeking to implement.

It's equally important to understand and respond to packaging options and what's coming down the road.

No. 6 plastic, polystyrene or Styrofoam, is popular today in to-go food containers, but is considered one to avoid, according to industry experts.

In 2020, New York State adopted the nation's strongest statewide ban of expanded polystyrene, single-use foam food and beverage containers, and polystyrene loose fill packaging materials, commonly known as packing peanuts.

Polystyrene foam is a concern for people and the environment. Foam packaging is one of the top contributors of environmental litter, causing negative impacts to wildlife, waterways, and other natural resources, as well as littering our communities and natural areas. It is lightweight, breaks apart easily, and does not readily biodegrade. When polystyrene foam ends up as litter in the environment, it can persist for a long time and may also become microplastic pollution. In addition, foam containers and loose fill packaging, such as packing peanuts, are not accepted in most recycling programs in New York State because the foam is difficult to recycle and has a low value. For these reasons, certain expanded polystyrene foam products are now banned in New York State to protect the environment, our communities, and to support sustainable materials management.

Under the Expanded Polystyrene Foam Container and Polystyrene Loose Fill Packaging Ban, effective January 1, 2022, no covered food service provider or store (retail or wholesale) is allowed to sell, offer for sale, or distribute disposable food service containers that contain expanded polystyrene foam in New York State. In addition, no manufacturer or store is allowed to sell, offer for sale, or distribute polystyrene loose fill packaging (commonly referred to as packing peanuts) in the state.

## **Better options**

From Kwik Lok, Eco-Lok features the sustainability your customers expect paired with the Kwik Lok performance that has set the standard in the bag closure industry for decades. Made with up to 20% less fossil fuel-based resin and requiring up to 20% less greenhouse gasses to manufacture, Eco-Lok makes your business more sustainable with every single sale.

Eco-Lok closures have exactly the same features and performance specs as the Kwik Lok products you have counted on for years, with a fraction the environmental impact. Eco-Lok maintains the qualities of existing Kwik Lok closures; it is printable, reusable, recyclable, and metal detector compatible.

Kwik Lok is fully committed to continuing to innovate and invest in materials science. This enables the company to offer products that utilize Post-Consumer Recycled (PCR) material or other materials that are recycled and recyclable. Kwik Lok's priority is helping our customers make advances in sustainability and minimizing our collective impact on the environment. For some, that means identifying opportunities to cut carbon emissions.



For others, minimizing plastics is the priority. Most are trying to find a balance between the two. Kwik Lok has closing solutions that meet these challenges and continues to innovate better solutions.

Eco-Lok is a sustainable bag closure made of plant-based polymer NuPlastiQ, uses up to 20% less fossil fuels in the manufacturing process and remains printable, reusable, and metal detector compatible.

Fibre-Lok is an environmentally friendly closure composed entirely of 100% post-consumer recycled paper that offers the same reliability as traditional Kwik Lok products for those looking for a 100% plastic free solution that is home compostable in some markets and recyclable in others.

Next-generation closing machines featuring laser-stitch technology. These indicate if a bag has been opened while also preventing bags from tearing.

“We remain focused on delivering solutions that are not only innovative, but also focused on sustainability. We understand that there is no one-size-fits-all closure that meets the varying sustainability needs of our international customers,” Carrell says.

## **Return to convenience**

In the recently released 2022 edition of Eating Patterns in America from The NPD Group, food industry advisor David Portalatin discusses six macro themes currently shaping the new realities of food and beverage consumption behaviors: economic transition, inflation, income bifurcation, sticky behaviors, total wellness, and the return to convenience.

“The rate of change in US consumers’ eating behaviors continues at a dizzying pace,” says Portalatin. “Anyone hoping to return to normal must understand that there is no normal, only an ongoing evolution as we respond to new realities.”

Here are the six trends he outlines:

**Economic transition** – Consumer spending in 2020 and 2021 experienced a stimulus-fueled surge that extended into the first quarter of 2022. But, the spending spree ended by the second quarter when stimulus money dried up, and inflation and economic uncertainty took hold. The positive and negative disruptions of the past few years may mean year-over-year economic metrics aren’t as straightforward as they’d ordinarily be in explaining the consumer’s health.

**Inflation** – Consumers are unlikely to reduce food and beverage consumption in the face of inflationary pressure. But, they will find ways to manage and allocate their food dollars. While inflation is more moderate for food away from home than food at home, the typical restaurant meal costs 3.4 times more than in-home food sourced from retail. To offset rising food costs, consumers are bargain-hunting when grocery shopping, eating more meals at home, and cutting back on restaurant visits.

**Income bifurcation** – One of the key themes currently shaping the food and beverage landscape is the difference in behaviors among income groups. Trends of upper- and lower-income consumers are starkly divergent. In the food and beverage industry, income bifurcation has profound implications for the total share of stomach trends, retailer and restaurant choice, dealing and promotions, and brands vs. private labels.



Sticky behaviors – Many eating behaviors adopted during the pandemic reflect a rapid acceleration of behaviors established long before the pandemic, like consumers eating most meals at home. Food and beverage behaviors may continue to “normalize,” but the consumer landscape has been transformed as consumers created new capacities and restaurant operators expanded capabilities to serve a more home-centric consumer.

Total wellness – Due to the pandemic, consumers are finding a balance between foods that contribute to physical well-being and those that serve more emotional needs. They’re increasingly in tune with the functional attributes of various foods and beverages that can contribute to both sides of this equation.

Return to convenience – Back to school and work create time pressures for home cooks and foodservice customers. And while home-centricity remains more prevalent, the return of mobility reintroduced the need for speed and convenience. For some occasions, this means a trip to a quick service restaurant, but for others, we want to retain our new at-home capacity, just with some shortcuts or time-saving techniques.

“America’s eating patterns are shifting to adjust to new realities, and food manufacturers, foodservice operators, and retailers will need to adjust their offerings and services accordingly,” Portalatin says. “Although the one constant is change, there is a constant to count on, the U.S. consumer will always need to eat, and then it’s a matter of figuring out what, how, when, and where.”

### **Cutbacks by consumers**

The number of US consumers cutting back on their grocery shopping as a result of inflation has grown during the past year, according to new research. In a survey commissioned by specialist PR consultancy Ingredient Communications, half of respondents (50.2%) said they had bought a food or beverage product less often in the previous three months due an increase in price.

This is significantly higher than 10 months earlier in late 2021, when the same survey found that 37.7% had purchased a product less frequently for this reason.

Meanwhile, nearly two thirds of respondents (62.4%) said they had switched to a cheaper brand, compared with 57.7% before. Retailer brands appear to have benefited from the squeeze, with 35.6% of respondents saying they had switched to an own label version of a product, versus 27.9% last year.

A total of 20.9% of respondents said they had stopped buying a food or beverage product altogether in the previous three months because it had become too expensive. In 2021, 19.1% of shoppers said they had traded out of a product for this reason.

SurveyGoo polled 500 consumers in the USA during the first week of October 2022. The previous survey was carried out in early December 2021 when inflation was already on the rise. Since then, prices have soared even higher. In September, year on year inflation for food consumed in the home was recorded at 13%.



The majority of respondents to the latest survey – 97.2% – said they had noticed food and beverage prices rising in the previous three months, compared with 94.9% in the 2021 survey.

Richard Clarke, Managing Director of Ingredient Communications, said that since they conducted their first price sensitivity survey, the war in Ukraine has exacerbated an already volatile situation.

“In manufacturing, it’s tempting to look for quick fixes to cut costs but in the food industry there are always risks to this,” Clarke said. “Consumers are very attuned to recipe changes and pack size reductions and social media means news of these can spread fast. At Ingredient Communications, we’ve always advocated using high quality ingredients that differentiate a product. But in these challenging times, it’s also worth talking to your ingredients suppliers to see how they can help. Many have extensive formulation expertise and might be able to advise on how to reduce input costs without compromising on quality or losing brand equity and consumer trust.”

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