

## focus on... national convenience show

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Don't miss the Farm Shop & Deli Show with its celebration of the benefits of attention to detail

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What technologies are indies bringing to their stores to give them the edge over the mults?

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Eight outstanding innovations that give a taste of the wealth of NPD on offer at the NCS



# Marriage of convenience

The National Convenience Show 2017 will leave no doubt: food to go and technology can help indies compete. What else is in store?

Alex Wright

**F**irst, the good news: the convenience sector isn't in bad shape right now. Store numbers rose by 1.3% to just over 41,300 last year [Grocery Retail Structure 52 w/e 1 April 2016].

Trouble is, for independent retailers at least, the major mults and co-operatives are driving that growth. Co-op store numbers climbed 3.1% to nearly 3,000; the grocery multiples opened 220 new c-stores during that period, a rise of 5.3% to 4,383 stores. Unaffiliated indie stores rose 1.9% to 19,000.

But it was indies operating as part of symbol groups and affiliated multiples that really suffered, with store numbers down 0.7% to just over 15,000 and 1.5% to 952 respectively. That means 109 symbol stores and affiliated mults ceased trading last year. Add to these woes the proliferation of discounters, the rise

of online, new regulations and uncertainty around Brexit and the Tesco/Booker merger and it's clear big challenges lie ahead.

How should convenience retailers rise to these challenges? Thankfully, there's no shortage of inspiration at this year's National Convenience Show and Farm Shop & Deli Show, which takes place from 24 to 26 April at the Birmingham NEC. The show will be packed with advice, experts, products and services to help retailers drive basket spend and raise frequency of shop.

**“Rather than categories it is missions driving the performance of convenience stores”**

If there's one thing that stands out in the messages coming from this year's exhibitors and organisers, it's that by marrying smart technology with compelling food-to-go offerings retailers will find themselves in good shape to face the coming challenges. The UK food-to-go market is expected to top £21bn by 2021 and there's a big slice of that waiting to be snapped up by the convenience sector, says Jai Singh, owner of Sheffield-based convenience retailer MJ's Go Local Extra.

It's all about understanding the 'mission' shoppers are on at different times of the day, says Singh. Putting on decent to-go options at lunch is no longer enough; shoppers also want to pick up a bit for breakfast or mid-afternoon snacks. If indies are going to be able to compete with the likes of Boots or the mults, they need to step up. “Rather than specific categories experiencing growth, it is missions that are driving the performance of ↗

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### NCS offers a wealth of ideas and opportunity

**What:** National Convenience Show

**When:** 24-26 April

**Where:** Birmingham NEC

With about 500 exhibitors showcasing their products and services and several thousands of visitors expected, this year's NCS promises to be one of the biggest and busiest yet.

Among the key talking points are food to go, with sales set to top £21bn by 2021, and health.

Booker, the UK's leading wholesaler, is returning to the show along with representatives from its four symbol groups, eager to speak with visitors about how they can work in partnership. WH Smith Local is also exhibiting.

Leading supplier brands include Aunt Bessie's, Butchers Pet Care, Cashzone, Nestlé and Subway. Key speakers include Chaz Chahal, manager of Costcutter and Simply Fresh, at Help Your Store Stand Out on 24 April, and Avtar Sidhu, of SimplyFresh, who will be talking at Make Room To Grow With Food-To-Go on 24 April and at Survive Or Thrive on 25 April. Saira Khan, of The Apprentice fame, will be also be delivering Focusing on



Customer Engagement and How to Engage with these Customers on 24 April.

Launched this year, the Great New Idea will be keenly contested by Barracudos' Coconut & Pineapple Protein Vitamin Water and CPL Distribution's Homefire Olive Briquettes. RH Hall's New Covent Garden Soup Server and Parcelly's new Key Exchange service are also vying for the prestigious award, with the winner being announced on 26 April.

"When I am looking for new ideas and inspiration, the NCS is the best source to keep me up to date and make sure I can speak with the right people to keep growing our business," says Sidhu.

NCS is co-located with the Farm Shop & Deli Show and The Forecourt Show, with free access for NCS visitors. To register visit [www.nationalconvenienceshow.co.uk](http://www.nationalconvenienceshow.co.uk)

### "Snacking fixtures within convenience stores need to reflect healthier eating trends"

convenience stores," he says. "To maximise this opportunity retailers are increasingly using link deal mechanics and cross-merchandising promotions to inspire customers and encourage them to increase their basket spend."

Of course this means providing a compelling range of hot drinks, cereal bars, sandwiches, snacks and fruit that matches (or beats) the competition throughout the day. In today's environment it should also mean hot food, says Will Robinson, MD of Stone Willy's Kitchen, supplier of branded hot food-to-go counters for the sector.

"Stone Willy's aims to provide retailers with a menu that will be popular throughout the day," says Robinson, who claims his business is the only of its kind in the UK to offer breakfast, lunch and dinner options. "Our pre-made selection has three crucial advantages for shops looking to start a food-to-go offer – a reduction in staff required, an increase in speed of service and the use of very little counter space."

#### On the go

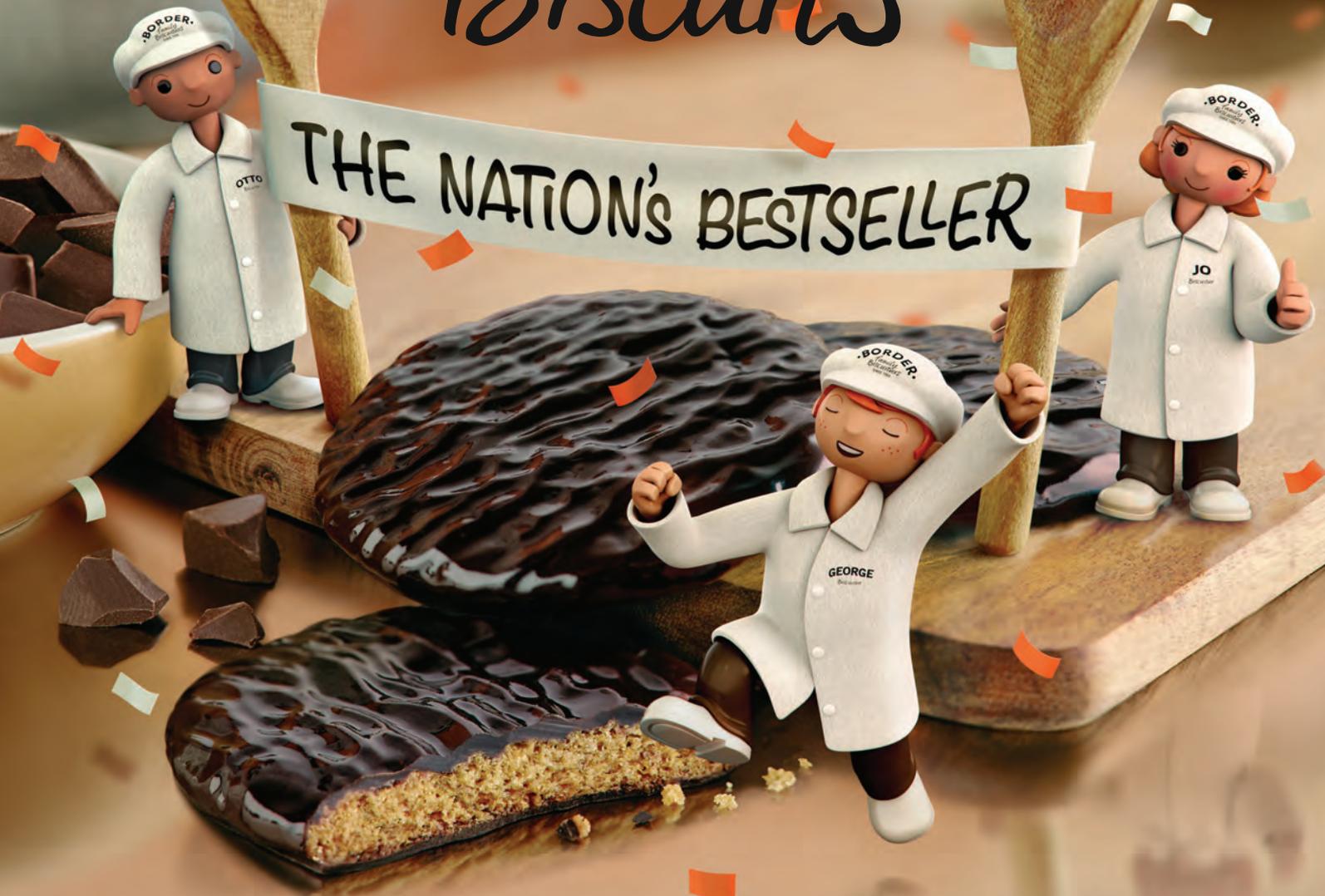
One of Britain's biggest food-to-go names – Subway, with more than 2,400 outlets across the country – will also be at this year's show, to speak to retailers about how a Subway franchise can deliver a quick, efficient and quality service to customers who want to pick up a sandwich and a drink to go. A range of hot drink suppliers including My Coffee Station and Espresso Plus will also be sharing the different solutions available to help retailers cash in on the growing trend for coffee on the go.

How to get on the go right will be the topic of conversation at the show's Retailer Hub at 1pm on Monday 24 April, when Convenience Store magazine editor David Rees will be joined by Him! research insight manager Matt Smith, SimplyFresh owner Avtar Sidhu and Manchester Spar retailer Paul Stone, who announced in March plans to open a new deli and foodservice operation in September.

"There will be some take-home products in there but it will be primarily a foodservice operation," said Stone at the time, adding that competition for viable sites for such development is stiffening. "New developments want big brands like Tesco and Sainsbury's. For the last couple of stores we have bought independents who are in the right location but

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\*Source: Kantar Worldpanel 52 w/end 04.12.16



### Attention to deli detail creates great farm shops

**What:** Farm Shop & Deli Show  
**When:** 24-26 April  
**Where:** Birmingham NEC

A big focus for this year's Farm Shop & Deli Show will be food and drink pairing, with many businesses adding wine and craft beers.

In this vein, there will be sessions on Perfect Pairing and Rethink Your Drinks Offering, both hosted by Colin Woodall from Woodall's Charcuterie and Richard Paul from Bradbury's Cheese.

Hannah Gallimore, Co-op corporate responsibility manager, will be on the Reduce Waste, Boost Profits panel with author and Love Food Hate Waste ambassador Richard Fox

on 24 April. Zoe Farmer, business development director for Costcutter, who will be talking at the Dragons' Pantry on 25 April.

Dan Dixon, sales director, exhibitions at William Reed, will also be joining Fox to present the Best New Ideas Awards on 26 April.

Other highlights include Paul Hargreaves, CEO of Cotswold Fayre, speaking about the essential skills of Harnessing People Power, while Charlie Turnbull, owner of Turnbulls Deli, will be hosting Liquid Gold



– Sourcing Superb Olive Oils and How To Expand Your Digital Delicatessen.

The fourth annual Farm Shop & Deli Awards winners will be announced on 24 April. They recognise the best in class in specialist independent retail, celebrating service standards, product innovation and community involvement.

Category awards are up for grabs across 13 specialisms. The regional winners from across nine UK regions will also be selected from the category finalists, as well as the coveted Farm Shop & Deli Retailer of the Year.

Nigel Barden, chair of the judges, says: "It's a joyous journey visiting the award finalists around the UK and, with standards being so high, it's the attention to detail that really makes the winners stand out."

To register, go to [www.farmshopanddelishow.co.uk](http://www.farmshopanddelishow.co.uk).

**"The advantage small independent retailers have is that they can react quicker to the needs of consumers"**

are not quite doing it right."

It's not just hot food that's hot right now; so is demand for products perceived as healthy. There has also been a big push towards seeds, micronutrients and free-from as consumers shun crisps in favour of healthier breakfast and on-the-go snacking alternatives, according to Gary Coggin, channel controller at 9Brand Foods, owner of gluten-free seed and carob energy bar brand 9Bar. With the free-from market forecast to reach £673m by 2020, he views this as an area of huge potential.

"Consumers continue to opt for healthier options for their snacking repertoire, choosing products that help them feel better," he says. "Bars continue to be a main driver of free-from snacks; however, sharing bags and future NPD trends in the mainstream could also deliver to the category."

Ryan Kohn, co-founder of Propercorn, which is showcasing its gluten-free popcorn, adds that retailers should also be prepared to give over more space to healthier alternatives. "People are eating healthier than ever before and snacking fixtures within convenience stores need to reflect this trend in order to stay relevant to the modern, health-conscious shopper. Retailers should present their shoppers with a range of healthier snacking alternatives and be confident to make space previously owned by traditional snacks and add in healthier options."

#### Technology

Technology is another big driver for retailers looking to establish a point of difference, ranging from parcel and grocery collection to cashless payments. Some have gone a step further, fully integrating their systems into one, enabling them to deliver better quality and speed of service. Take Parcelly's Click&Collect service (see right), which is already in Costcutter stores nationwide.

"The service allows consumers to receive parcels from any online retailer or carrier in the world through our mobile platform," says Parcelly's chief executive Sebastian Steinhauser. "It is a win-win for the retailer because they can convert redundant space into storage capacity for parcels, while also earning a commission, and it drives footfall back into their store, where they can showcase the quality and value of their products and services."

As online and e-commerce become more popular among time-pressured shoppers, exhibitors including Digital Foodie will be available to offer the latest solutions, whilst Concept Data Displays will be demonstrating how to attract additional customer spend through innovative in-store PoS.

Such services can help c-stores live up to their very name. "The big advantage small independent retailers have over the multiples is that we can react quicker to consumers' needs," says Chris Wardle, owner of Jack's Convenience Store and Post Office. "A c-store by its very name has to be easy to shop in, always have the right product available and has to deliver an exceptional service."

Ease of experience is crucial, and with contactless payment technology now established across grocery, it's time for unaffiliated indies to adopt. So says James Frost, CMO of Worldpay UK. "The high volumes of lower-value transactions, which dominate the convenience sector, are ideal for electronic payments, which are now the preferred payment method of choice for countless customers. And this will only accelerate as mobile payments including Apple Pay, Android Pay, and even Samsung Pay, set to launch in the UK later this year, fuel further growth."

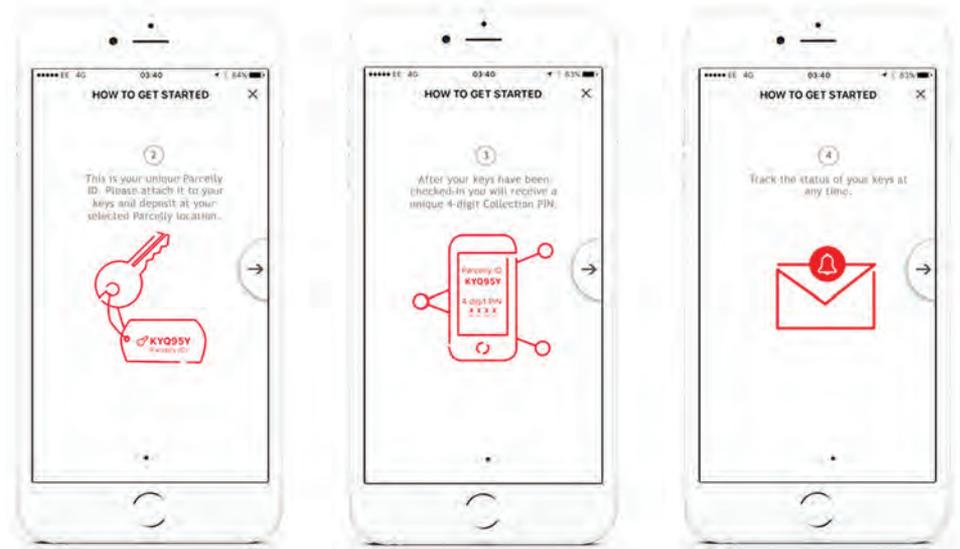
It's not just the shopping experience that can be improved with technology, however. So can back room functions such as ranging and merchandising. For example, in February the Co-op announced the appointment of JDA Software Group to oversee the introduction of localised ranges to its 2,500 c-stores. "We are focused on making our shops easier to navigate, offering great food and excellent service," says commercial director Michael Fletcher. "We are refocusing our store shops to meet the specific needs of their locality."

### Loyalty

Loyalty and reward programmes are also in vogue among retailers. Last month, Spar launched its new loyalty app, Spar Go, giving customers immediate rewards on their purchases and notifying them of offers at their local store. "Retailers are going through challenging times, and investment and new ideas are vital for businesses' survival," says Spar UK retail director Ian Taylor. "We want our retailers to always be looking at ways to innovate and develop, and we believe that foodservice is the future of convenience."

There's no doubt that with consumers shopping across a wider array of channels, the need for c-stores to provide quality and value has never been greater, says Avtar Sidhu, owner of Sukhi's Simply Fresh, who will be involved in six sessions.

As a result, retailers have had to adapt their ranges, bringing in a greater diversity of categories including household items, toiletries, and free-from and alternative products to ➔



## Parcelly Key Exchange

**Launched:** April 2017 **Manufacturer:** Parcelly **Hall/stand number:** Hall 19, U91

Having turned the parcel delivery industry on its head with its Click&Collect service, Parcelly will be launching a new Key Exchange service and targeting it at independents. With a network of almost 1,000 partners nationwide, the new service enables property owners to exchange keys with family, friends, sub-tenants, maintenance and cleaning companies or other third parties through its app, and provides retailers with a commission.



## Cashmaster Connect

**Launched:** January 2017  
**Manufacturer:** Cashmaster  
**Hall/stand number:** Hall 19, U88

This system allows retailers to track cash more accurately in real time. The application connects the Cashmaster cash counter to the user's PC, laptop or tablet, enables them to record cash-count data, making financial reporting easier and more accurate than before, claims Cashmaster.



## CBE cashless self-checkout

**Launched:** April 2017  
**Manufacturer:** CBE Software  
**Hall/stand number:** Hall 19, R100

Meeting the growing demand for contactless payments, CBE will be launching its Cashless Self-Checkout for the independent c-store retail sector. Partnering with NCR, the terminals' small footprint fits into most c-stores, and it has already been piloted in Spar stores.



## New Covent Garden Soup Server

**Launched:** April 2017  
**Manufacturer:** RH Hall  
**Hall/stand number:** Hall 19, U119

Making its debut will be the New Covent Garden Soup Server. This fully automatic and easy-to-use serving solution enables retailers to earn a profit from day one. Soup is served at the touch of a button with automatic portion control, and reporting services are included.



**“The top four criteria to get right are cleanliness, friendliness, ease of shop and availability”**

## Fori meat snack bars

**Launched:** October 2016 **Manufacturer:** Fori **Hall/stand number:** Hall 20, J90

Fori will be showcasing its four high-protein meat snack bars – Chilli Beef, Moroccan Lamb, Piri Piri Chicken and Thai Turkey at the Farm Shop & Deli Show. These alternative healthy snack bars are free from every major allergen except egg white. Available in Selfridges and made with meat, fruit seeds and seasoning, they have no additives, preservatives or emulsifiers. Co-ordinator Jess Jones says: “Our bars meet the growing trend towards a viable healthy and convenient alternative snack.”

meet customers’ changing needs.

“Successful retailers have found the balance between offering one or two options in these areas and not cluttering up the fixtures, making it more difficult for shoppers to find what they’re looking for,” he says. “Value is now defined by a range of elements such as access to the packs and products that shoppers want to buy, clean, tidy and easy-to-shop stores, interesting ideas and inspirational and relevant promotions.”

Such considerations are crucial, of course. In fact, research by Him! reveals that product availability, ease of shop, staff friendliness and cleanliness of store are at the front of shoppers’ minds when visiting c-stores, though it’s worth noting that 92% of shoppers cite location as the key reason for visiting a particular store.

“These are the top four criteria c-stores need to be getting right – these factors revolve around in-store experience and convenience,” says Louise McWhirter, Him’s head of insight & digital. “Given the regularity of visits by c-store shoppers, clearly getting this right is important.”

## Regulations

As is negotiating the reams of red tape and new regulations faced by convenience retailers. James Lowman, chief executive of the Association of Convenience Stores (which will hold its annual summit at the show on 25 April), says there are big changes ahead for the sector with new alcohol and tobacco rules coming into force this year that retailers need to be aware of and act accordingly.

“Firstly, the introduction of regulations around the standardised packaging of tobacco products and the revised Tobacco Products Directive are likely to have an impact in store, as minimum pack sizes change as well as the types of tobacco that are allowed to be sold,” he says. “On alcohol, the introduction of the Alcohol Wholesaler Registration Scheme will require all retailers to check with their wholesaler to ensure that they are legitimate, with the intention of clamping down on the black market.”

So, whether it’s clamping down on the black market, doing battle with the supermarkets or just developing new lucrative markets such as food to go, this year’s show could herald the beginning of a new era for Britain’s c-store operators.

## Black Liquorice Gluten Free

**Launched:** December 2016  
**Manufacturer:** Black Liquorice Company  
**Hall/stand number:** Hall 20, H105

Fed up with a glut of expensive, poor-tasting imported liquorice, The Black Liquorice Company decided to enter the market two years ago with a unique product. It has now launched a new sugar and gluten-free version made from cornflour instead of wheat flour.



## Ceiba Cinnamon Infusion drinks

**Launched:** April 2017  
**Manufacturer:** Ceiba Drinks  
**Hall/stand number:** Hall 20,

Inspired by a cinnamon tea drink in Mexico, Ceiba Drinks will be exhibiting its Coconut, Mango & Passion Fruit, and Lime & Ginger cinnamon-infused health drinks. Refreshing yet low in sugar and calories, the product is naturally high in antioxidants.



## Gin Jam

**Launched:** January 2017  
**Manufacturer:** Pinkster Gin  
**Hall/stand number:** Hall 20, K48

Flush from the success of its Boozy Berries (raspberries in gin), Pinkster Gin decided to turn its surplus stock into Gin Jam. The gin-infused preserve, which has a 2.5% abv and comes in 340g jars, is perfect for teatime or cocktails. It has seen strong demand from independent retailers.



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