

EQUIPMENT, DESIGN & OPERATIONS

THE REFRIGERATED AREAS OF A SUPERMARKET CONSTITUTE SOME OF THE MOST VALUABLE REAL ESTATE IN ALL OF RETAILING. While both equipment manufacturers and retailers have understandably concentrated on making refrigerated cases keep products within critical temperature ranges, they haven't ignored the ability of these showcases to effectively merchandise product.

In many operators' minds, the number of facings has become a more important measure of the size of a case than cubic feet. It's all about grabbing the attention of the consumer and putting the product in front of her eyes.

"Manufacturers have developed great-

looking packaging that is meant to capture the shopper's attention," says Tony Kadysewski, marketing and communications manager at Wilkes-Barre, Pa.-based Trion Industries, Inc. "The case has to be able to hold those packages in a neat manner and be able to show off the products to

the customer."

Merchandising is certainly the name of the game once the consumer is inside the supermarket. In order to maximize merchandising potential, refrigerated case designs have evolved to better display the products. A look at the cases available to the supermarket

Chilling PRESENTATION

BY DAVID LITWAK



Retailers are evaluating medium-temperature cases as much for their merchandising potential as for their cooling abilities.

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operator today versus those on the market 20 years ago shows this evolution. Product was simply stacked inside the old, plain cases, with the onus being on shoppers to seek out their desired items. Modern cases are designed to actively bring the product in front of customers, making them more passive recipients of the packaging's message.

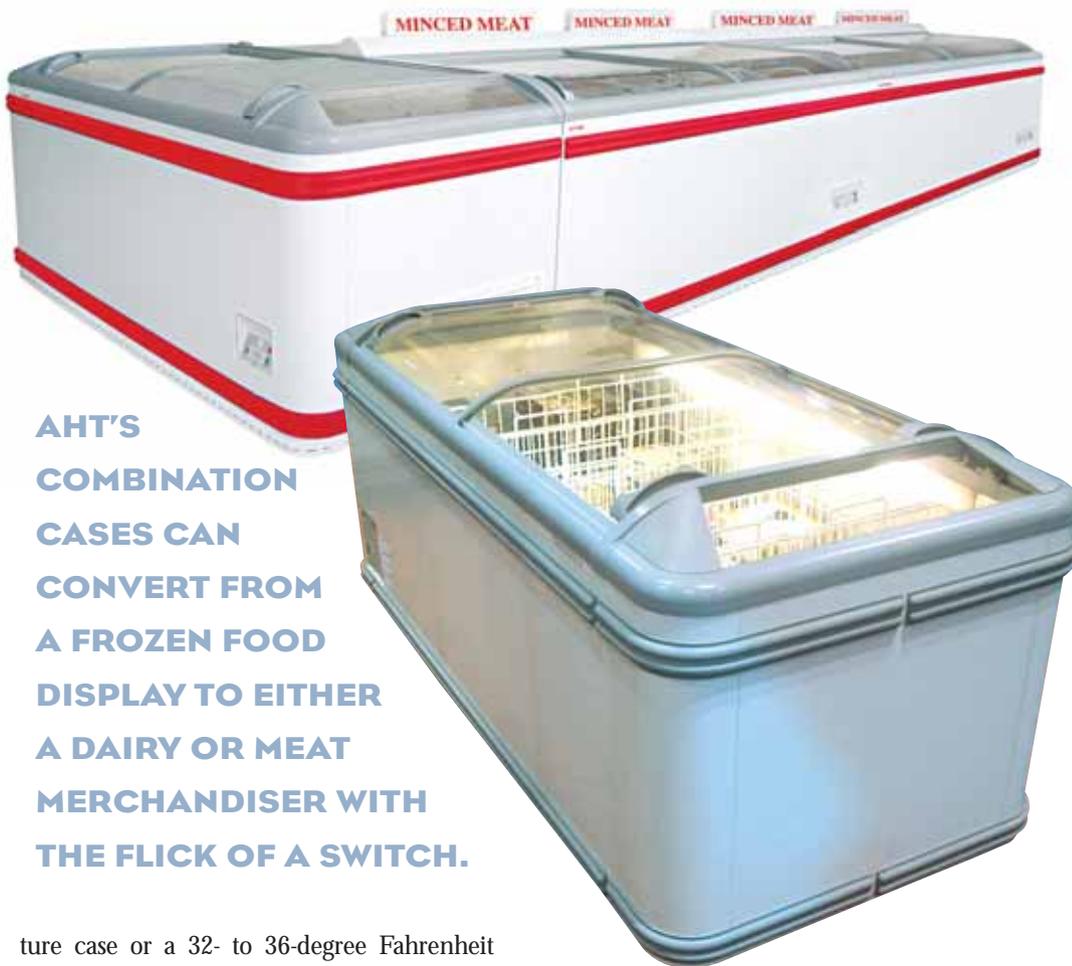
Upright medium-temperature cases and multideck showcases evolved primarily because of their greater ability to merchandise product and bring it to consumers' attention. Refrigerated case manufacturers have been saying for years that outside of energy efficiency, the No. 1 feature that retailers request from them is the ability to gain extra facings within the same footprint.

Another example of how merchandising needs have driven showcase design is the increasing popularity of mobile merchandisers. These relatively small refrigerated cases on wheels have been developed to travel all over the store, to wherever there is an opportunity to reach shoppers. Not only have mobile chilled displays been developed but specialized stationary showcases as well. Many supermarkets now feature refrigerated endcap units, small refrigerated cases for the checkout and even coolers in the grocery aisles that cross-merchandise products, such as Italian cheeses in the pasta and sauce aisle.

FLEXIBILITY'S ADVANTAGES

"Retailers are looking for flexibility in the cases in terms of the way in which they can be used to merchandise the product," says Howell Feig, director of sales for Hanahan, S.C.-based AHT Cooling Systems USA. "With our equipment being 110 volt, the retailer can move it anywhere in the store. This gives the retailer an advantage. The equipment also provides a combination of different temperature ranges, and they have the ability of allowing customers to shop them from both sides, which all put together offers [the operator] outstanding flexibility."

Many of the AHT coolers actually operate in three different temperature zones; they can be switched from one to another just by changing the control knob. The units can go from a frozen food case to a dairy-tempera-



**AHT'S
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ture case or a 32- to 36-degree Fahrenheit meat case, says Feig. The company's Malta model is now available as a combination unit for the U.S. market.

Shelf management has been a major emphasis for supermarket operators for many years, and the concept has migrated from the grocery aisles to the refrigerated case. The difference between managing dry gondolas and refrigerated cases, especially upright chilled showcases, is that product holds its position much better in the dry racks than in the refrigerators. Packages of differing shapes and rigidities tend to fall or lose position and become much harder for shoppers to see.

"A big aid to merchandising the refrigerated case is the availability of shelf management systems that allow retailers to billboard the product," says Kadysewski. "We have developed a range of items to be used in a shelf management system, including dividers, bins and pushers to keep the product facing forward and straight. There are a variety of products that we produce as part of complete systems in plastic or wire that are available to be used in either a refrigerated or frozen case." One of them, he says, is Trion's Wonderbar Merchandising System.

One of the goals of a shelf management system for the medium-temperature case is to keep the shelves organized. Trion has developed a bar system for the vertical cooler that restrains a wide variety of items; even frozen pizza can be kept standing and facing forward.

IMPACTFUL SIGNAGE

A part of effective merchandising within the refrigerated case is a signage program that provides impact. What signage can do for the grocery shelf in terms of stopping the shopper in her tracks and drawing her in for a closer look can also be achieved in the refrigerated case. For instance, Trion makes right-angle flags for the vertical cooler that are visible even within a door case. The company also offers a set of front rails that accommodate signage.

Besides calling attention to the product, signage can aid in the organizational process. Effective shelf labeling helps to place the product properly on the shelf and then keep it where it belongs to avoid confusing customers. The use of partitions and other shelf management implements aids in deterring placement errors.

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According to Kadysewski, sales from the refrigerated cases can be increased by 14% to 20% with a shelf-organization program. A study by the retail marketing industry trade association POPAI found that 50% to 70% of purchases in the supermarket, including from the refrigerated case, are spontaneous, which makes it all the more important to grab the attention of shoppers as they walk by the case.

Merchandising of refrigerated foods often goes beyond making the product's package pop out. With the growing reliance of many supermarket operators on fresh foods, the visual appeal of the foods themselves within the meat, deli and seafood cases has become an extremely important facet of merchandising. If the color and appearance of a cut of meat in a case are not perfect, its salability diminishes.

KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

This is where the technology built into the case can enhance its ability to merchandise fresh product. Manufacturers have developed cases that keep products looking fresher longer because they can hold them at the right temperature. Ukrop's Super Markets, which recently opened a new unit in Williamsburg, Va., for example, has installed Prestige Service Cases from Conyers, Ga.-based Hill Phoenix in its meat department. The cases use Hill's Coolgenix technology.

"Ukrop's chose Coolgenix not only for its

unique design, which accentuates the display of the product, but also for the experienced, extended product life that is achieved," says Brad Schwichtenberg, Hill's vice president of business development. "Red meat is brought to a beautiful bloom and maintained longer, and service seafood shelf life is extended and color is maintained better."

Another way to maximize the merchandising impact of the refrigerated case is through lighting. Advances have been made in the lighting systems and lamps used in both medium- and low-temperature cases. "Our models come with internal lighting which gives significant visibility to the product and helps the product stand out," says AHT's Feig.

COLOR ENHANCEMENT

Better overall visibility is just one aspect of the role that lighting can play in the refrigerated case. One of the most important factors in the salability of a package of meat or fish is its color. If beef doesn't have that red glow, or if a piece of fish does, it will simply sit in the case. In selling fresh meat and seafood, the first impression is often everything. Lighting is key because a light source that has good color rendering can enhance the product greatly, while



one that tends to wash out the natural color will diminish the product's chances for sale. Lamps with high color rendering indexes are available for almost every type of fixture, including incandescent, fluorescent and compact fluorescent.

Manufacturers have also begun to use alternative light sources in refrigerated cases. For instance, North Prairie, Wis.-based Zero Zone has been offering its customers both LED and fiber optic lighting. The company's fiber optic technology situates the bulbs on top of the case, outside of the refrigerated zone, and brings the light into the case through fiber optic cables. The system reduces hot spots in the case and makes maintenance much easier. Using LED lamps instead of fluorescents can save retailers both energy and maintenance costs. □