

RETAILING 101: COOL STUFF AT END OF THE AISLE

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By Travis Hartman

THE ENDCAP IS WHERE YOUR SHOPPING SHOULD START

As shoppers wind their way through the Coop, ticking items off a shopping list, eyes wander up and down the aisle among a wide array of items, looking for what they need. When they exit certain aisles, they may encounter a treasure trove of new items, potential gifts and delightful things from around the world, curated and displayed on the shelf at the end, known as the endcap.



PHOTO BY JOHN MIDGLEY

Endcaps like this one can boost sales significantly for the items it features.

ENDCAP BASICS

In normal stores, endcaps are highly prized real estate, and stores often charge a premium to display items on them. Actual numbers are hard to pin down, but anecdotal evidence from 2018 points to somewhere between \$6 billion and \$8 billion charged for placement each year in the United States. This is because endcaps punch far above their weight in sales. According to a study done in 2009, in a typical store, only about 2% of total items are displayed on endcaps, but the items placed there result in around 30% of total sales. Supermarket research from the last 50 years has established that endcaps can increase an item's sales from between 23% to as high as over an 1,000% increase.

Almost every aisle in the Coop has shelving that faces out at the end, but the Coop has designated three endcaps that feature new and interesting items for shoppers, where items are rotated and updated frequently. Unlike most stores, the Coop does not charge distributors to place items on endcaps. The three endcaps are referred to as the “new products” endcap (across from the eggs), the chocolate endcap (at the front of aisle 6/7) and the specialty, or fancy, food endcap (across from the chicken case).



PHOTO BY JOHN MIDGLEY

Fancy food buyer Yuri Weber poses in front of the fancy sauces and sausages.

YURI'S TAKE

Yuri Weber, the buyer for the fancy foods endcap, explained the difference between the selections: "For the front endcap, it's new products (and sometimes mis-picks from distributors) and things that just don't quite fit anyplace else—water filter systems, for example."

YURI WEBER SAYS THAT THE FANCY FOOD ENDCAP SHOULD CONTAIN ITEMS THAT WOULDN'T NORMALLY SHOW UP WRITTEN ON YOUR SHOPPING LIST BUT, ONCE YOU'VE SEEN THEM, ARE HARD TO RESIST.

Treats? "The chocolate endcap is fancy chocolate and seasonal sweets," Weber said. "The fancy food endcap usually has a smattering of local products, high-end olive oils, vinegars and hot sauces that rotate in and out. It also acts as an extension of the cheese department, in that we buy cheese accompaniments that would be sold at the cheese counter of more traditional stores."



Colorful chocolate bars entice customers on the endcap near the checkout.

GIFTS AND SHOPPING SEASONS

Weber has been stocking the fancy foods endcap since 2008, when he inherited it along with the cheese department. His philosophy for the fancy food endcap is that it should contain items that wouldn't normally show up written on your shopping list but, once you've seen them, are hard to resist. Items that you might purchase as gifts or simply on impulse. He has a rough schedule for varying items corresponding with the time of year, like BBQ sauce in the summer and fancy olive oil and vinegar and gift boxes during the holidays.

"I'm always on the lookout for new items either locally produced or specialty from Europe that members would be interested in. These are either discovered by (Coop cheese specialist) Britt [Henriksson] or myself, recommended by members or distributors," Weber said.

ENDCAPS HOLD A TREASURE TROVE OF NEW ITEMS, POTENTIAL GIFTS AND DELIGHTFUL ITEMS FROM AROUND THE WORLD.

WHAT'S YOUR FANCY?

Items on the fancy food endcap don't normally make their way into the general circulation of the store, but there have been some exceptions when it just made sense and the items have become mainstream enough to start getting scribbled onto shopping lists. The chili crisp condiment is one that became so popular that it transitioned to a regular item this year, migrating to aisle 6B with the other ethnic condiments. "I think it was an item that captured the zeitgeist for some reason," said Weber. "That and it's really tasty."



Fancy hot sauces are lined up on an endcap near the express checkout.

PHOTO BY JOHN MIDGLEY

Sometimes Weber finds that the fancy foods shelf is just too small to hold all the fancy foods. At one point he pulled in a wide variety of Rancho Gordo beans that have now found a home in aisle 6: Black Garbanzo, Christmas Lima, Cranberry, Domingo Rojo, Mayocoba, Royal Corona, Pozole and Wild Rice. "I tried to pick beans that were either different from what we sold in the bulk aisle or what members had suggested in our Instagram feed," said Weber.

Weber says the biggest challenges stocking the fancy foods endcap are that all the prices need to be applied with a price gun, and that the area can get congested when the express line snakes around. But this may be a boon to the shopper waiting in line, who can peruse some of the finest items from around the world while waiting to check out.

Editor's Note: Since this article was written, there is a new endcap that features discounted food. Located at the back end of aisles four and five, across from the yogurt, the selections here change frequently.

Travis Hartman has been a Coop member for over 10 years and likes trying to find the why behind the who, what, when and where.