

9 Retail Trends Shaping Grocery, Specialty, and QSR in 2025

Retail doesn't sit still—and neither do the people it serves. From fresh food to fast casual, today's brands are getting sharper about how they show up: with more personality, more relevance, and more focus on real-life moments that matter.

In this Q2 roundup, we're highlighting the trends reshaping everything from grab-and-go meals to in-store play zones to pickup-only restaurants. These aren't predictions—they're opportunities to build smarter, more meaningful experiences right now.

Grocery: The Fresh Revolution

1. Grab-and-Go, Reimagined

Convenience is no longer a compromise. The next wave of grab-and-go is chef-led, visually rich, and highly portable, with brands partnering with local talent to elevate everyday meals. Think seasonal menu drops merchandised like boutique takeout, or smartly bundled snack kits that speak to specific wellness goals.

Merchandising takeaway

Partner with culinary influencers to develop limited-edition refrigerated meals. Transform the cold case into an engaging experience zone with transparent packaging, chef stories, vertical signage, QR codes, and seasonal kits. Clear, modular packaging and branded grab-and-go labels can reinforce speed and intention while creating “stopping power” in the fridge.

2. Produce Takes the Spotlight

Gone are the days of anonymous apples and fluorescent lighting. In 2025, fresh produce is thriving, with grocers transforming everyday aisles into immersive, sensory experiences. Picture scent-zoned sections for citrus, tactile displays for heirloom veggies, and origin-story signage that introduces the farmers behind the food.

Merchandising takeaway

Create “flavor flights” for seasonal items, such as tomatoes, mushrooms, or stone fruits, and invite customers to compare textures and tastes. Transform produce zones into brand stages using bold color blocking by variety, spotlighting, podium merchandising, and farmer features. Fresh produce origin signage and texture-rich bins turn the ordinary into the unforgettable.

3. Tech-Powered Transparency

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Health, sustainability, and personalization are converging in a powerful way. From microbiome-aligned meal bundles to AI-powered kiosks that provide personalized fresh food recommendations, shoppers are seeking clarity and care at shelf speed.

Merchandising takeaway

Integrate smart labels that show harvest dates, eco-impact scores, or sourcing maps. Add QR codes or shelf talkers to highlight sourcing, carbon impact, or prep tips. Create convenience with digital labels or LED displays that sync to freshness data and offer goal-based grab-and-go kits or family-style meal builders to help busy consumers prepare healthy food at home with ease.

Specialty Retail: Restorative, Joyful, and Ecosystem-Ready

4. Retail as Refuge

In a world of digital overload and emotional fatigue, physical stores are becoming spaces of restoration. Retailers are designing for serenity—with soft color palettes, natural materials, and immersive, slow-paced layouts that encourage mindfulness over urgency.

Merchandising takeaway

Create contemplative corners or texture-rich nooks using lighting and sound design to evoke calm and presence. Use experiential design, like sensory zones or lounges, to encourage dwell time and increase conversions. For printed elements, incorporate oversized backdrops, calming or monotone color palettes, and soft messaging to reinforce the tone.

5. Strategic Play Has Grown Up

Play isn't just for kids—it's also a strategic design principle. Whether through gamified loyalty programs, nostalgic brand moments, or multisensory retail storytelling, brands are using play to build emotional resonance and cultural relevance.

Merchandising takeaway

Bring in analog, tactile touchpoints—like scent bars, motion-activated displays, and lenticular prints—that encourage pause and interaction. Make space for “kid intelligence” by inviting Gen Z and Gen Alpha input. Use nostalgic fonts and bold colors to create visual curiosity and story-sharing moments.

6. From Stores to Ecosystems

Shoppers aren't just buying—they're joining. Specialty brands are thinking beyond apparel to build connected ecosystems of lifestyle, service, and community. That means loyalty

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programs tied to wellness perks, in-store activations that double as content opportunities, and new revenue streams that reach beyond the rack.

Merchandising takeaway

Introduce a content layer to your brand, such as podcasts, videos, and short-form editorial, and reflect this in signage and print. Design membership cards and event posters as portals into your brand's lifestyle. Use in-store materials to spotlight content, drive participation, and reward community engagement.

QSR: Speed Meets Soul

7. Smaller, Smarter, and More Adaptive

Quick-serve restaurants are going modular, ditching fixed formats in favor of design-forward, behavior-driven prototypes. From walk-up windows to pickup-only kiosks, brands are retooling around real-world habits.

Merchandising takeaway

Test pop-up formats in high-traffic zones. Use mobile-first designs, branded menu boards, and delivery lockers to streamline service and reduce friction. Try incorporating behavior-driven signs, bold exterior graphics, and color-coded pickup zones to guide, inform, and elevate confidence in the experience.

8. UX at Every Touchpoint

Today's QSR experience is no longer just about the food—it's about the flow. Brands are rethinking menu board design, drive-thru language, and even AI ordering voice tones to create seamless, personality-rich interactions.

Merchandising takeaway

Treat your operational journey like a brand campaign. Add surprise-and-delight moments in the drive-thru, and sync lighting or digital cues with signage to signal service phases. By aligning tone, structure, and personality across menu boards, mobile apps, tray liners, and POS materials, you'll create an integrated, memorable brand experience.

9. Brand as a Flavor System

Even in value-driven formats, visual identity and emotional connection matter. Leading QSRs are embracing flavor-forward branding, drawing from heritage, local flair, and bold design to differentiate and delight.

Merchandising takeaway

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Visual identity is part of the appetite. Elevate flavor through storytelling rooted in place, people, and tradition. Infuse printed menus with meaning by highlighting heritage dishes and regional ingredients. Create storytelling signage near pickup counters to deepen emotional connection, and align typography, color, and tone across all materials, from menu boards to tray liners.

The Takeaway: Design for How People Feel

Human-centered design is a delicate balance of innovation and intention.

The threads running through these trends are clear: care, clarity, and creativity. Whether it's turning a produce aisle into a moment of discovery or rethinking what a restaurant can be, brands are making bold moves that feel refreshingly human, yet modern.

These aren't far-off futures—they're already unfolding in real time. And as the lines between service, space, and story continue to blur, the retailers who thrive will be the ones who lead with purpose and stay close to the pulse of everyday life.

Whether you're curating a produce display or prototyping a pickup-only restaurant, the most powerful retail strategies of 2025 are those that respect the complexity of modern life. They anticipate needs, celebrate humanity, and invite people to engage more deeply with brands, with environments, and with themselves.

Download the full report here: [Q2 trends report](#)