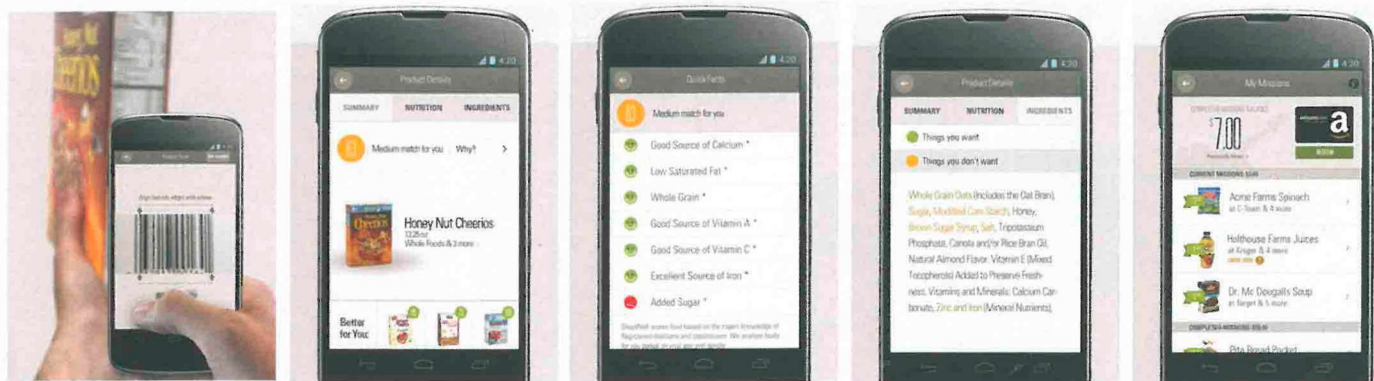# Grocery Apps
Gone Wild

Whether retailer-branded or third-party, today's popular grocery apps offer consumers rebates, shopping lists and dietary guidelines.

By Tammy Mastroberte

Today's consumers are looking to save money, build lists, search recipes and check the nutritional ingredients in their favorite products, and the latest apps — both grocer-branded and third-party — are allowing them to do this and much more.

"Consumers want apps that help them and make the shopping experience faster and more effective," Steve Bishop, managing director and co-founder of Brick Meets Click, a consulting firm based in Barrington, Ill. "They love deals and digital coupons, and based on our research, digital coupons and circulars are the No. 1 reason shoppers go to an app or a retailer's website. It's still the first thing that drives consumers to action."

Price-matching apps not specific to a retailer offer consumers the ability to compare ads, circulars and deals at a variety of retail locations in their area. Some of the most popular include PriceMatcher, Grocery Smarts, Grocery Pal and Favado. Walmart also offers its own version, Savings Catcher. If an

app user finds a local competitor offering a lower price on a product than that offered by Walmart, the Bentonville, Ark.-based company will give her an eGift Card for the difference in price.

"Instead of going through and looking at all the circulars, with these apps, someone else has done it for consumers," says Mark Heckman, principal at Bradenton, Fla.-based Mark Heckman Consulting, who works with supermarket retailers. "Right now, saving money, comparing circulars and downloading coupons are driving things."

Also in the savings category is a group of apps providing rebates and cash-back post-purchase. These include Checkout 51, SavingStar and Ibotta, which all allow customers to save money without coupons. Checkout 51 requires customers to take a photo of a receipt to redeem deals, and once an account reaches $20, the customer will receive a check in the mail, Bishop explains. Ibotta lets consumers transfer the cash earned from rebates to a bank account, using PayPal or Venmo.

Many leading grocers offer digital coupons

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HITTING THE MARK
HarvestMark's ShopWell app enables shoppers on restricted diets to find food products that meet their needs.

through their branded apps, including targeted promotions tied to loyalty programs and mobile-exclusive offers. Companies such as Hy-Vee, Safeway, Giant Eagle, United Supermarkets and Kroger either offer digital coupons through their apps or enable customers to load digital coupons onto their loyalty cards.

"Customers are enjoying the many features available with the Giant Eagle apps, including viewing weekly sale items, quickly clipping and storing e-offers to the Giant Eagle Advantage Card, and keeping track of [fuel rewards program] fuelperks!," notes Daniel Donovan, spokesman for Pittsburgh-based Giant Eagle.

Aside from coupons and rebates, consumers are also using the ability to build a shopping list, whether scanning products at home, pulling from past purchases or adding them from their favorite recipes. This is a staple feature of many of the grocer-branded apps available today, but there are also third-party apps dedicated to creating shopping lists, including Grocery IQ, Shopping List, Grocery List and MyShopi. Some also incorporate coupons into the ability to sync and share lists with others.

"After saving money, building a shopping list

would be the next requirement consumers are looking for," Bishop says. "After that, it's about personalized offers through loyalty programs, recipes and other added content."

Innovative Grocers
When grocers first began releasing mobile apps a few years ago, the main features included viewing weekly circulars, locating a store and building a shopping list, but today's apps have gone further, and will need to continue to innovate to stay relevant, says Heckman.

"It's about going beyond and saving the consumer time," he notes. "Retailers need an app that breaks through the clutter to help people understand what their needs are, help them pre-shop at home or interface with the store so they can use it to check out. I see apps being used, but it's amazing to me how few are seen in the hands of customers when actually shopping the store."

Grand Rapids, Mich.-based Meijer's mPerks app offers coupons, builds in its loyalty program and allows customers to scan receipts, but it also helps them locate products in the store, and even gives them a heads-up on deals.
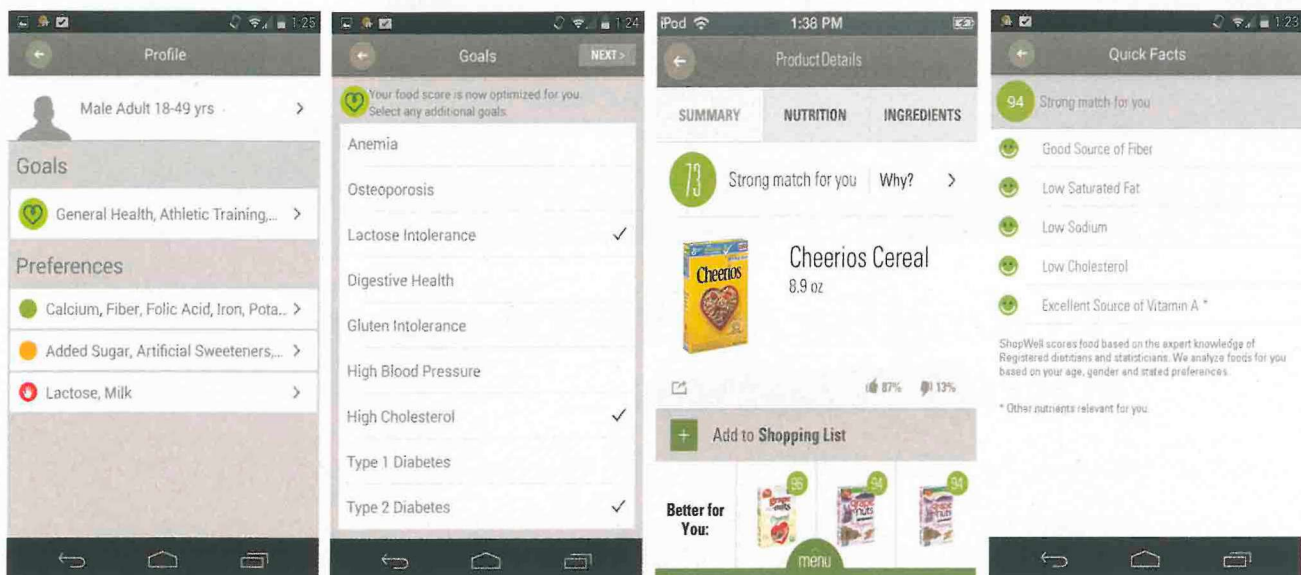
The app "does a nice job, and it will even send a text message to customers letting them know when gas prices are getting ready to go up," Heckman says.

Publix, based in Lakeland, Fla., also goes the extra mile with its app, allowing customers to preorder lunchmeats and set a pickup time. This fits into the consumer need for saving time and making the shopping trip easier.

"There is a refrigerated basket with the pre-cut items so customers don't have to wait in line," Heckman points out. "These are the things that offer time savings to a shopper."

Pleasanton, Calif.-based Safeway offers a separate app dedicated to grocery delivery, enabling customers to scan product bar codes at home to place orders. Some grocers, including Meijer and Giant Eagle, have launched separate pharmacy apps for shoppers looking to refill prescriptions, receive alerts when prescriptions are ready for pickup, and more, filling another need state for shoppers.

Even independent grocers are innovating their apps to do more, such as Wisconsin-based Madison Fresh Market, which launched its Fetch Rewards app enabling shoppers to scan items with a smartphone to check out, rather than having to place the contents of their shopping carts on the conveyor belts.

All About Nutrition

For those struggling to engage consumers while they're the store, the ShopWell app by HarvestMark reports that 50 percent of its usage takes place inside a grocery store. Consumers on restricted diets, such as vegetarian or gluten-free, can use the app to scan bar codes at home or in the store to check whether products meet their dietary needs, and the app will even suggest alternative options.

The app, which hit the market two years ago, has been downloaded by more than 1 million users, with 100,000 monthly unique visitors, according to Elliot Grant, founder and CEO of Redwood City, Calif.-based Harvest-

Mark. It can be customized to include weight management, heart-healthy, lactose intolerance and diabetes parameters, among others, and the company continues to add parameters based on customer feedback.

"Customers want more private label products added to the app, and also additional diets," Grant notes. "Paleo is something we are looking into now."

The app lets users create a shopping list, compile favorite items and share with others via social media. It also engages them with weekly dietary tips targeted to the specific goals entered, and gives rewards for completing surveys within the app, such as a $4 gift certificate.

"We just launched the weekly quick tip, and more than 90 percent will hit the thumbs-up on a tip," Grant says, explaining that the app allows the company to capture a variety of data, including what store a customer is shopping, trends in dietary needs, types of products scanned, and whether scans are taking place at home or at the store level. Retailers and manufacturers can also purchase this information from the company.

"We can tell retailers who is shopping in their store and how it compares to shoppers in their geographical area," Grant explains. "We might identify a spike in women looking for a heart-healthy diet, and can identify what products they are looking for, and we have geo-located every store in the United States, so when someone walks in, we know what store they are shopping."

Right now, according to Grant, HarvestMark is working on taking these analytics a step further so it can not only identify what items are being scanned, and whether a shopper looks at alternatives suggested by the app, but also whether she ends up purchasing the item. **PG**

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