

Introduction

Shelf management is one of the most powerful tools grocery retailers have to influence sales and shopper behavior. Item placement is critical to getting your product noticed, chosen and ultimately purchased, and can mean the difference between a product that thrives and one that is overlooked - especially in today's fast-paced environment, where consumers demand convenience, value, and choice.

Shelf management challenges are further magnified in supermarket perishable departments, where additional factors include limited shelf and display space, high inventory turnover, and potential for high, shelf-life related, product shrink.

Modern shelf management requires a blend of data-driven science and shopper-centric design. By understanding customer needs and strategically allocating shelf space, retailers can create an impactful shopping experience that drives loyalty and maximizes profitability. Shelf space is prime real estate, and the success of your products depends on how well it's managed.

This white paper highlights proven strategies for shelf optimization in the New York Metro area, where intense competition, high consumer expectations, diverse demographics, and smaller store footprints require retailers to adapt and innovate to win.

Top Strategies for Shelf Domination

Shelf presence not only drives sales - it is also critical to reinforce brand identity and influence long-term shopper behavior.

- **Know your Shopper**

Understanding your target audience's needs, preferences, and shopping habits is the foundation of effective shelf management. Products should be positioned where consumers expect to find them in the store, minimizing friction and stress during their shopping experience. Visibility, whether within the aisle or via secondary displays, increases the chance of conversion.

- **Eye-Level is Buy-Level**

Products placed at eye level get noticed and purchased more frequently - up to 23% more than those on higher or lower shelves, according to data published by Trax Technology Solutions. With most purchase decisions made within seconds, eye-level placement makes a big difference, and ensures products are immediately visible and top of mind.

Enhancing the Customer Experience

A positive shopping experience is crucial in attracting, retaining and satisfying customers. Strategic shelf management plays a key role in creating that experience and encouraging repeat visits.

- **Optimize Item Placement**

Position premium items higher and children's items lower. Make essential products easy to find, reducing frustration and encouraging basket growth.

- **Group Complimentary Items**

Place related or like-items together to create a natural flow. Cross-merchandising (e.g., pasta near sauces, chips near dips) helps shoppers discover new items in the segment while streamlining decision-making.

- **Test and Measure Performance**

Use data to evaluate planograms. Track sales before and after changes are made to identify what works and what resonates with your customers. Store-specific insights can reveal whether adjustments are needed by category, segment, or location.

Responding to Current Consumer Trends

Consumers' needs and wants shift rapidly in response to economic shifts, lifestyle changes, and cultural influences. Grocers must be in tune with the ever-evolving trends and expectations impacting shopper behavior. Flexible shelf strategies and timely execution are essential for retailers' success.

- **Health-Conscious Shoppers**

Consumer demand for foods that focus on health & wellness continues to grow – including organic, clean label, gluten-free, and low-sugar products. According to a recent dunnhumby study, health-conscious shoppers represent \$285 billion in grocery spend annually, making up roughly a third of the \$1.7 trillion grocery industry. Prioritizing items that claim to support physical and/or mental health and giving them prominent shelf space ensures visibility and signals that the retailer understands these wellness-driven shoppers.

- **Value-Driven Shopping**

With inflation reshaping purchasing behavior, more shoppers are opting for private-label products and/or even switching stores in search of savings. In June 2025, First Insight reported that 84% of consumers now trust in the quality of store brand products more or the same as national brands – and 45% say they switched from buying a national brand to private label when the product met or exceeded expectations. As brand loyalty erodes, shelf placement becomes even more critical – brands must capture their audience’s attention within seconds to compete.

Shelf Management Matters in the NY Metro Market

A fast-paced environment, high consumer expectations, diverse consumer base, and limited store space are all challenges presented in the New York Metro market, providing unique opportunities for shelf management in our area retailers.

- **Quick-Moving, Grab-and-Go Culture**

Many shoppers often purchase smaller quantities and make quick decisions. Product placement that prioritizes convenience supports impulse purchases and sales of “grab n’ go” items. Products not optimally placed in the right spot risk being overlooked in seconds, reducing potential sales.

- **High Consumer Expectations**

Value-conscious and time-sensitive shoppers expect quick, efficient shopping experiences. Poor placement, confusing allocation or cluttered sections will frustrate consumers and push them toward competitors.

- **Diverse Demographics and Tastes**

The NY market includes a wide range of income levels, dietary needs and cultural preferences. Shelf strategies should appeal to each location’s unique neighborhood and customer base. Planograms must be tailored to fulfill local needs & expectations - and in turn will build repeat business and grow sales.

- **Maximizing Limited Space**

Many NY market stores often have smaller footprints due to high real estate costs and limited availability. These smaller store footprints demand precision, making it necessary for retailers to strategically create planograms that maximize every inch of space available - and optimize shelf space for top-selling products within each section of the store. Using

data and fact-based decision-making eliminates guesswork and ensures slow movers don't waste valuable space and hurt profitability while high-demand products receive the visibility they deserve. Making sure top selling products are visible – along with proper pack-out and efficient replenishment will maximize sales. These same shelf management principles should be applied even in smaller footprint stores where computer assistance is not deployed, by activating a best practices “flow-a-gram” technique.

Conclusion

Modern shelf management is both an art and a science. By combining shopper insights, data-driven strategies, and adaptability to consumer trends, retailers can unlock stronger sales, greater customer loyalty, and higher efficiency. Nowhere is this more critical than in the New York Metro area, where limited space, high competition, and diverse consumer demands raise the stakes.

The retailers and brands that succeed will be those who view shelf management not as static organization - but as a dynamic strategy that always evolves with the customer.

Nick DeFinizio is a Senior Space Management Specialist at RDD Associates, responsible for numerous Dairy and Frozen categories in several prominent retail grocery banners in the NY Metro area. He has over 25 years of experience in the food industry, having held roles in shelf management, space planning, category management, merchandising, sales, supply chain and business development. In addition to enthusiastically designing planograms that propel RDD clients' and customers' sales, Nick loves traveling with his family, taking his dog on walks to the park, watching his favorite Philadelphia sports teams, and playing pickleball. To learn more about the latest trends in space management, Nick's food industry expertise or RDD's ELEVATED service solutions, please visit our website or contact: info@rddassociates.com