



**Editorial article first published in April 2006**

## **Wraps on a roll**

Once viewed as a product strictly reserved for Mexican and Latino dishes, tortillas today have a much broader role. Dishes made with tortillas, or wraps, can be found on virtually any restaurant menu and are now making significant inroads to the UK sandwich market.

Tesco, who were one of the first major retailers to embrace the wrap concept back in 1997, announced last summer that wraps had for the first time outstripped sales of their sandwiches in many of their outlets – and this is not an uncommon statement with many retailers reporting increases in wrap sales of anything from 30-70%.

Wraps originated in the Mayan culture and have since been a staple in Mexican homes for 1,000 of years. 30 years ago tortillas were considered a marginal ethnic food but now rivals standard bakery products in the US with sales just under 2% that of white bread - in fact Americans consume over 7 Billion lbs of tortillas a year!

### **Premiumisation**

With the UK market starting to cool off in terms of sandwich sales the 'food to go' market is becoming increasingly fragmented. Greater emphasis is now being placed on higher value premium products and wraps fall squarely into this category.

Wraps are perfect for displaying interesting and adventurous taste combinations and by their very nature are associated with this sector of the market. They are also perceived as having a lower carb content and are definitely considered to be more 'hip' than the traditional sandwich wedge. However, although the taste sensations of indulging in your favourite wrap can be rewarding, the overall eating experience can often be marred by just how awkward they are to release from their packaging – not to mention the mess you can get into as Chicken pieces slathered in Caesar dressing invariably end up in your lap or on your keyboard.

## **Packaging Issues**

The current usage of cardboard sleeves and plastic flow wrap does nothing to emphasize the wrap's status as a premium food item. It looks cheap, doesn't protect the product in transportation or on the shelf and can lead to a truly awful customer experience. Little wonder then that it has become a target for innovation.

However, designing packaging for wraps in cardboard is not an easy or straight forward process, which is why it has never been done before. Wraps are both flexible and also fairly bland to look at. This makes them difficult to present and the addition of window patches, which requires card borders to support them, reduces visibility. Finally, as a designer, you have to contend with a wealth of manufacturing, storage and production issues AND have to come in at a price that is acceptable to the market.

At ROKOV Design we have spent six months researching these key areas. We visited numerous retail outlets, polled over 120 customers and held extensive talks with a number of key food producers. The result is our new fully biodegradable wrap pack – this pack not only protects and presents the filled wrap like no other card product on the market but comes flat packed, easily 'pops' open ready for use and is also stackable.

## **Retail Display**

Adam Newland of Raynor Foods, who will be the first food producer in the UK to go into production with the new pack said, 'Retail display is an indispensable tool for driving 'food to go' sales and yet its effectiveness still remains largely unappreciated. In a stagnant but highly competitive market packaging remains as one of the most flexible and powerful tools to help us to add value to our customer's food offerings – and one we will continue to develop and embrace.'

Adam's comments reiterate our own commitment to constant innovation. With higher disposable incomes, shorter lunch breaks and the further development of the UK's 'snacking' culture, the effective display and creative merchandising of all take-away food items will become increasingly important. These developments and opportunities should not be overlooked by any retailer hoping to gain a competitive advantage.

David Rokov is a corporate strategy consultant and Managing Director of the ROKOV Design Group. Tel: + 44 (0)870 774 4343. Web: [www.rokov.biz](http://www.rokov.biz)