

CONNECTING WITH CONSUMERS



## The Morning News

### Chains cater to habit-driven breakfast customers with portable sandwiches and pastries.

By Lisa Bertagnoli

This year has been a banner year for breakfast, with chains adding everything from breakfast bowls and savory sandwiches to portable sweets to morning menus.

All are meant to boost breakfast, a sunny spot in an otherwise gloomy economy. One in five consumers always or often eats weekday breakfast away from home, and that figure jumps to one in three on weekends, according to *Restaurants & Institutions'* 2008 New American Diner Study. Why? The three top reasons are time (46%), convenient restaurant location (28%) and drive-thru or takeout options (28%).

Concepts that do well at breakfast consider the daypart serious business, even though check averages are lower than at lunch or dinner.



Bojangles' engineers its entire operation around the making and serving of its signature breakfast sandwiches.

“The breakfast customer for us is not an add-on,” says Eric Newman, general counsel and executive vice president at Charlotte, N.C.-based [Bojangles' Famous Chicken 'n Biscuits](#), which serves its breakfast menu, including signature biscuit-based sandwiches (99 cents to \$2.59) all day.



Breakfast is served all day and accounts for 40% of sales at Bojangles'.

Breakfast accounts for 40% of the chain's sales (60% of which is via the drive-thru), and production of breakfast governs the entire concept.

“What we are trying to do is simple but not easy,” Newman says, noting that Bojangles' has upgraded its coffee and experimented with twists such as split sausage links, instead of a patty, on a biscuit. “We already have a diverse breakfast-sandwich menu,” he says. “The challenge is to execute better and quicker.”

### **Sandwiches Galore**

Successful breakfast items are portable, value-priced and “safe” in terms of flavors and textures, like the biscuit sandwiches on which Bojangles' builds its breakfast business.

Successful breakfast items are portable, value-

Indeed, according to R&I's New American Diner Study, sandwiches are the most frequently ordered breakfast item (59%), followed by coffee (48%), pancakes, waffles and French toast (38%), juice and juice drinks (34%) and bagels and biscuits (33%).

No wonder, then, that chains are expanding breakfast-sandwich selections this year. Rollouts include Miami-based Burger King's mini breakfast sandwiches, dubbed [BK Breakfast Shots](#) and sold in two- and four-packs, and St. Louis-based [Hardee's Texas Toast Breakfast Sandwich](#), with egg, American cheese and a choice of sausage, bacon or ham on Texas toast (\$1.99).



Einstein Bros. Bagel's Bagel Poppers offer customers a bite-sized spin on the chain's namesake product.

### **Beyond Biscuits**

Other concepts are experimenting with equally portable items that offer a break from sandwiches.



Cinnabon made sweets portable with Cinnabon Stix: The pastries and dipping sauce are packaged in the same car-friendly clamshell.

In January, the [Del Breakfast Bowl](#)—with hash-brown sticks, scrambled eggs and jalapeño bacon (\$2.99)—joined a burrito and taco on Lake Forest, Calif.-based [Del Taco](#)'s breakfast menu.

Since March, Atlanta-based [Cinnabon](#)'s Cinnabon Stix (\$2.99 for five, \$3.99 for 10) come with frosting and sticks in the same clamshell, for ease of eating. In early April, Denver-based [Einstein Bros. Bagels](#) introduced Bagel Poppers, bite-size bagel bits (\$2.99 for 12 to 14) packaged in a lidded plastic cup.

The Bagel Poppers court morning taste buds: “Typically people aren’t as adventurous in the

morning,” says Chad Thompson, senior director of menu development at Einstein, Manhattan Bagel and Noah’s Bagels. “They’re looking for recognizable food and flavors.”

Bagel Poppers also address portion size, an issue Thompson says is becoming more important to morning customers. [Noah’s](#), the company’s West Coast bagel concept, now offers two under-400-calorie options: the Egg White Florentine Wedge, served with turkey sausage, and an egg-white sandwich served with ancho chili sauce.

## Tough Competition

While Einstein’s Bagel Poppers build on a product the three concepts are known for, Noah’s breakfast entrée innovations “are definitely a way to hold the fort down, if we don’t want to lose ground to our competitors,” Thompson says.

It’s a wise move, considering customers’ habits at breakfast and the competition in the field.

“Breakfast is the most habitual daypart there is,” says Dennis Lombardi, executive vice president of foodservice strategies at WD Partners, a Columbus, Ohio-based restaurant design and consulting firm. [McDonald’s](#), with its wide breakfast menu and premium coffee program, “owns” quick-service breakfast, but there’s room to steal a bit of its share, Lombardi says.

Sandwiches and wraps—portable and with familiar morning flavors—are top to-go breakfast items.



“Have a compelling offer and give me a compelling reason to try it,” he says. And make it quick: “Speed of service is especially important in the morning—it’s a purposeful trip.”