

INDUSTRY INSIGHTS: SPOTLIGHT ON CPG

November 2021

Consumer packaged goods (CPG), along with the retail and financial services industries, still rule digital ad spending. In fact, the CPG industry, specifically, is expected to hit \$30 billion this year. eMarketer has curated this collection of interviews with CPG marketers to understand their marketing mix amid current challenges like waning brand loyalty, rising prices, and stocking issues.



MEET THE LEADERS



Lynn Blashford
CMO, White Castle

Now in her 11th year with the company, Blashford is responsible for brand-building, strategy, advertising, media, promotions, social and digital engagement, shopper marketing, licensing, and innovation for the food products line and White Castle menu. Basically, she's keeping the "Crave" alive and prospering for both the restaurant and retail divisions for the family-owned organization. [Page 4](#)



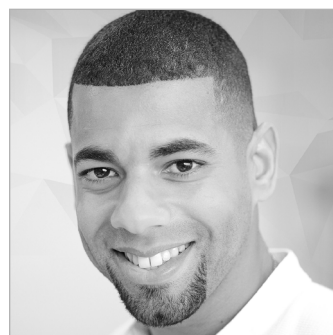
Sameer Malhotra
CEO and Co-Founder, Cafe Spice

In 2003, Malhotra formed a partnership with Whole Foods Market, marketing the start of Cafe Spice as a grab-and-go meal enterprise that brings the authentic flavors of India and beyond to consumers—and expands palettes globally. [Page 10](#)



Nadina Guglielmetti
Vice President and General Manager, Marketing, The Vitamin Shoppe

Guglielmetti is a marketing and communications veteran who has launched and scaled best-in-class marketing experiences for top-tier brands. In her role at The Vitamin Shoppe, she oversees omnichannel marketing including loyalty, customer research, customer relationship management (CRM), performance, and brand marketing. [Page 6](#)



Alex Matos
Managing Director, Nirvana Water Sciences

A seasoned and innovative marketing executive in the CPG space, Alex is a results-oriented leader with proven experience connecting brands to consumers via revenue-driven marketing and customer-facing experiences. [Page 12](#)

OVERVIEW

Digital ad spending in the US increased by \$19.79 billion last year, a nice result given the stagnancy of the country's overall media ad market (which includes traditional formats, like TV, radio, and print, where ad spending declined by 18.1%). We anticipate there will be \$38.83 billion in new digital ad spending this year, for a total of \$191.09 billion, as certain industries unleash their previously constrained budgets and others maintain their accelerated pace of digital transformation. That influx of ad dollars will be the largest in absolute terms since we began tracking these metrics in 2016.

The retail industry was the first vertical in the US to spend \$20 billion on digital advertising, a threshold crossed in 2018. By the end of 2022, retail will exceed \$50 billion in spending (\$57.20 billion), a mark that no other industry will approach in the next couple of years. CPG, along with financial services, will remain distant trailers in second and third place, respectively, while the bulk of industries will spend between \$10 billion and \$20 billion per year through the end of our forecast period in 2023.

Digital ad spending by device

Mobile advertising is by far the preferred destination for digital ad spending in the US, just as it is everywhere else. However, mobile's ever-accelerating domination of the digital ad market appears to finally be leveling off. After seizing large chunks of the market from nonmobile options every year since 2016, mobile will see its share of the pie settle in at roughly 68% for the rest of our forecast period.

The emerging popularity of connected TV (CTV) advertising is the primary reason that nonmobile ad spending is no longer losing share. Even so, every single industry in the US will spend the majority of its digital ad budget on mobile this year, as usual, with the lowest share being 57.1% and the highest being 76.5%. CTV's time is coming, but clearly mobile still rules the digital roost.

Five industries will devote more than 70% of their digital ad budgets to mobile. CPG, along with entertainment, computing products and consumer electronics, financial services, and telecom will all continue to spend a greater share on mobile than the national average.

US Digital Ad Spending, by Industry, 2019-2023 billions

| | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Automotive | \$13.64 | \$12.42 | \$14.96 | \$17.01 | \$19.00 |
| Computing products & consumer electronics | \$9.80 | \$12.79 | \$16.50 | \$19.03 | \$21.56 |
| CPG | \$18.61 | \$23.21 | \$30.56 | \$36.03 | \$41.69 |
| Entertainment | \$7.22 | \$8.14 | \$11.16 | \$13.00 | \$14.89 |
| Financial services | \$17.44 | \$20.99 | \$24.49 | \$27.63 | \$30.75 |
| Healthcare & pharma | \$8.61 | \$10.95 | \$12.22 | \$13.63 | \$15.00 |
| Media | \$7.42 | \$8.05 | \$9.75 | \$10.80 | \$11.62 |
| Retail | \$28.74 | \$35.38 | \$47.59 | \$57.20 | \$66.64 |
| Telecom | \$10.33 | \$12.09 | \$13.80 | \$15.32 | \$16.59 |
| Travel | \$6.09 | \$2.99 | \$3.54 | \$4.05 | \$4.54 |
| Other | \$4.54 | \$5.26 | \$6.50 | \$7.24 | \$7.90 |
| Total | \$132.46 | \$152.25 | \$191.09 | \$220.93 | \$250.18 |

Note: includes advertising that appears on desktop and laptop computers as well as mobile phones, tablets, and other internet-connected devices on all formats mentioned; numbers may not add up to total due to rounding

Source: eMarketer, June 1, 2021

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WHITE CASTLE'S LYNN BLASHFORD, CMO

October 21, 2021



This year, White Castle celebrates its 100th birthday—and with it, a century's worth of memorable moments. We spoke with Blashford about the innovative approaches and strategic marketing moves that have kept generations of customers craving White Castle.

White Castle has become a pop culture icon with the “Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle” films and product extensions like clothing, sneakers, and even candles. What can you tell us about marketing a brand that's become part of the pop culture zeitgeist?

You're right, we've always been a part of pop culture. We don't like saying [we're] a cult-like brand because that feels too niche, but we do understand that there's an element of the brand that has always had some bit of street cred. We were the first fast food hamburger chain, so I guess that gives us credibility as an industry pioneer. When the [Harold & Kumar] screenwriters and New Line Cinema came to us and said, “Hey, we'd like to do a movie about two guys that are on a quest to satisfy their ‘crave’.” Can we use White Castle?” Many people think that we were paid millions for that. We weren't. They asked permission to use us because the screenwriters were from New Jersey and true “cravers” of the brand. It's been fun to curate [products for] people who are fans of the brand. When we're in marketing, the ability to optimize that [can] be a conduit for people who love the brand and can celebrate it in different ways.

White Castle marked an industry first when it brought its sliders into the grocery aisle in 1987. In the last 35 years, how has your CPG strategy evolved?

I think we were the first restaurant chain brand to move into the freezer section. At the time, people were coming into restaurants and saying, “Give me 100 sliders. I'm going out of town and the family says I can't

come [home] unless I bring White Castle with me.” These stories were so frequent, our general managers would wrap them all up in foil and cellophane and people would drive across the country with sliders to take to family and friends and put them in their freezer and then heat them up later. Around the same time, microwaves were starting to become a staple in kitchens across the country. Our third-generation president, Bill Ingram, went to several large prominent CPG manufacturers to say we wanted to put our sliders into the freezer section, but he was turned down. So we decided to do it ourselves.

What changes have you seen in brand perception or the customer mindset?

We've created this new memory of how White Castle is shared in homes, whether as an after-school snack or at mealtimes. What's shifted is that the majority of consumers who are shopping for the brand are unfamiliar with ever having been into a restaurant—which is great, because it means the product stands on its own merit as a tasty slider.

You've made some recent changes to your CPG retail model. Tell us more about that. What factors have contributed to your success?

We had been very fortunate that we had a lot of organic growth over the decades with very little advertising or marketing. We were reaching a point that we wanted to grow awareness as well as our household penetration. So a few years ago, we hired a shopper marketing agency to help us become a little more tactical. Shopper marketing, ecommerce, and retailers have so many digital platforms now. We saw the benefit of that by growing new audiences who may have been shopping the aisle but weren't selecting White Castle before.

Then, the frozen aisle was rediscovered in the last 18 months as consumers stocked up their freezers. We, along with the category, have really grown and we can barely keep up with consumer demand. Some of our trade has had to pull shopper marketing back a little bit, just to keep pace with what consumers are buying.

White Castle has had a lot of marketing firsts, starting with popularizing newspaper coupons in 1933. You were also the first fast food chain to have its own website in 1996. Which traditional media channels are you still using today?

We're still [using traditional channels] for our restaurants because we're a regional chain. It's a little simpler to use traditional media coupled with digital and social media, and there's probably not much that we have not tried through the years. But it's not just about the channels, it's also about the creative. We look at tone, entertainment, and the other affinities that our shoppers and consumers have.

Between brick-and-mortar and online sales, White Castle has access to a lot of customer data. How do you use this data to inform future promotional strategies?

Social listening is a current source we can react to quickly. An interesting fact about our CPG product, the grocery sliders, is that people eat the sliders in bed a lot. We were seeing a lot of posts where people would microwave the sliders and then they'd be sitting in bed watching TV or on their laptop eating the sliders. When we did our latest round of campaigns for "Long Live Sliders," one of the segments was a couple kicking back at the end of the night, eating sliders. That came out of social listening and watching behaviors.

This year you're celebrating your 100th birthday. That is certainly a lot of sliders! What is White Castle doing to celebrate this milestone?

We wanted to make sure we were celebrating with the people who have been with us and who have been so loyal for so long—and with the consumers, whether through the restaurants or the CPG product. The biggest celebration culminated this past summer with a time machine. It was a digital and mobile sweepstakes, looking at the decades [prior] and at the future. We also partnered with Coca-Cola, which has been our restaurant partner for 100 years. We used them in a lot of memorabilia. Our mission is to create memorable moments every day. We try to do that both internally with all the people we work with, as well as our consumers, customers, and key accounts, whoever they may be.

**Want to learn more about how
White Castle is approaching its next
100 years? [Watch our video interview](#)**

THE VITAMIN SHOPPE'S NADINA GUGLIELMETTI, VICE PRESIDENT AND GENERAL MANAGER, MARKETING

October 13, 2021



As interest in health and wellness expands, The Vitamin Shoppe has plans to begin franchising. We spoke with Guglielmetti about how The Vitamin Shoppe balances the needs of in-store shoppers with a growing online customer base, and how social media, customer loyalty

programs, and key partnerships are all contributing to the company's growth.

Online purchases of vitamins and supplements increased by 24% last year. Who is your target online audience, and how did The Vitamin Shoppe elevate its digital strategy to embrace this demand?

Our target online audience is still 50/50 male to female, but unlike in our stores, is a bit younger and more value-oriented. They're looking for promotions, and shopping across every vendor. That's very different from retail, because when you step into a store, you're already committed; you're just shopping across brands as opposed to different platforms or retailers. We tried to make shopping frictionless, especially between our stores and website, by improving our buy-online, pickup-in-store and curbside capabilities. We communicated our value message—that we're quality driven and have the right expertise in health and wellness—and we also tried to be competitive in our prices and promotions. And it did wonders. Our customers were happy. We saw the sales had very little disruption and a lot of growth.

Great content can often bring about a new customer base. What's your approach to working with social media influencers and professional athletes?

It's about showcasing our credibility. We work with micro-influencers,

who may not have a huge audience, but are passionate about health and wellness and staying fit. We work with recognized mid-tier athletes. And we also work with Olympians. For an Olympic-level athlete, quality means everything. They care about not just making their muscles bigger, but about immunity, health and wellness, and mental fitness. We can help them across all of those things, which is why [these] partnership[s] [are] great.

How do you measure the success of your content marketing?

We measure how people engage with our content: Are we driving people to our website's blog content, for example? And if they are engaging on our site, are we leading them to a conversion? But sometimes it's about more than just a conversion. Are we inspiring customers? Are we getting The Vitamin Shoppe name out there? Are we continuing to help people understand that we're a place that cares about quality, innovation, and a level of expertise within health and wellness?

Part of your role also includes overseeing The Vitamin Shoppe's CRM strategy. How do loyalty programs play a role in your customer retention?

It's hard for retailers right now. Customers have been less loyal, there's more cross-shopping. Our loyalty program is fundamental in retaining customers and getting them engaged with our brand. We're a bit unique, in that 90% of our customers are in our loyalty program. The loyalty program helps us keep our customers sticky. And we have a lot of first-party data.

How are you using that data to improve the customer experience? Any examples you can share?

For our best customers, we look at everything from frequency of shopping and what they're buying, to how we can personalize communications so that they're not just getting spammed by our content. It gets us a little bit deeper into what customers care about

and how we can surface either a promotion or a piece of content to help them get to their goals.

The Vitamin Shoppe also sells its products on Amazon, and Amazon's pharmacy offering is picking up speed. How will this impact your strategy?

I see Amazon as an opportunity to get in front of customers who are looking for a certain level of expertise in health and wellness. It's where customers often go first to understand what they want. So I want to show up there and help them understand that we can offer them solutions, whether it's our private brand or a third-party brand.

Last year, The Vitamin Shoppe began a partnership with Instacart. What impact has this partnership had on brand awareness and sales?

Instacart has been a phenomenal partner. People were looking for easy ways to shop with us outside our stores and they wanted to shop across retailers. And that's exactly what Instacart does. I think we were the first health and wellness partner to partner with them. From a brand awareness perspective, they've supported us, gotten us out there, and done advertising on our behalf. It definitely helped. We're thrilled that we were able to get into a new channel, drive additional sales, and also meet customer needs and expectations.

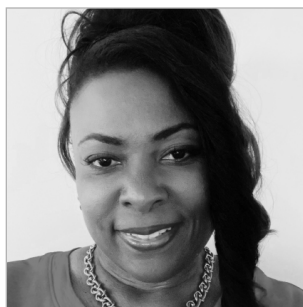
When you think about your future marketing strategies or partnerships, what new channels are you planning to test?

I'm actually less focused on newness right now. What I am focused on is: How do I improve the orchestration of my communication across all of the channels I have? And then, how do I tackle the future that's cookieless? The Vitamin Shoppe is not a brand that tries to be everywhere. TikTok is still a channel that we're learning. We are launching SMS. It's not new or sexy by any stretch, but we're super excited. We think this is a good new platform to weave in with everything else we're doing.

Want to learn more about how The Vitamin Shoppe is fueling healthy growth? [Watch our video interview](#)

CLOSING THE GAP IN CONSUMER INSIGHTS WITH FIRST-, SECOND-, AND THIRD-PARTY DATA

This article was contributed and sponsored by [Acxiom](#).



Joyce Turner
Industry Managing Director, CPG
Acxiom

It is without question that consumer product goods (CPG) and manufacturing have created high-value intersections with customers.

These industries are creating value through product functionality and features, and efficiently selling through broad retail franchises.

Yet, established brands across CPG, pharma, manufacturing, and many other sectors are seemingly more vulnerable, with heavy reliance on brick-and-mortar sales and distribution networks that create a disconnect between the brand and the end consumer. Addressing change—whether it be driven by new customer habits sparked by the pandemic, the demise of third-party cookies or evolving privacy regulations—is an opportunity to drive your brand forward and effectively protect and grow your market share. Here are a few strategies to consider:

1. Focus on connections between people

Your product features and functionality will continue to anchor your brand's value among consumers. To extend that connection, there is an opportunity to leverage content creators and influencers who truly love your brand and are willing advocates. With trust at the core, content creators can help you deepen customer connections. Instead of paid ads, think of this as a way to bring your product to life authentically. To increase the value exchange with customers and drive adoption of your product, offer access to exclusive content via customer authentication.

2. Use the demise of third-party cookies to build a roadmap of identity success

Assess your current state. You may already have critically self-examined where you are and where you would like to be related to being able to build meaningful connections with people. And then you likely worked backward to figure out what you need to understand about people to make that happen. Where does that information come from now, what will go away without third-party cookies? You need to know who is engaging with your brand at each intersection of your outreach and customer interest. If you count on third-party cookies to do it, the party is over and a new strategy is needed.

3. Re-assess the role of all potential data sources (first, second, third; known and pseudonymized)

Today, first-party data is almost exclusively referred to as captured personally identifiable information (PII)-based data (email address, phone, etc.). In doing so, CPG brands and manufacturers are missing out on their single largest source of current first-party data—digital engagement! Most CPG and manufacturing companies could double, triple, and quadruple their first-party data by simply deploying a first-party media tag that captures all engagement data and sends it to a platform like a customer data platform (CDP). Once the data resides within the CDP, signals can be replicated into scaled look-a-like audiences, and customer “next touch” moments can be automated.

Learn more about [Acxiom CPG/MFG and how we can help](#).



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CAFE SPICE'S SAMEER MALHOTRA, CEO AND CO-FOUNDER

October 26, 2021



As customer needs have evolved, so has the marketing strategy at Cafe Spice. In our conversation with Malhotra, he shared how agility, teamwork, and a “make it happen” philosophy have helped the brand penetrate new channels and markets.

Cafe Spice was born out of a restaurant that you and your family ran in New York City in the nineties. Today, the brand produces ready-to-eat meals found in grocery stores across the country. What inspired this shift into the prepared food business?

My goal was to open a Cafe Spice restaurant in every university town around the country, through a hub-and-spoke model. We created a commissary in Long Island City to keep the recipes consistent. Then Whole Foods opened in Columbus Circle in New York City and they put in the newspaper that they were going to have Indian food out there every day. Indian food's very hard to make from scratch. So, that's [when] my father and I went to the store and gave them our card. [Whole Foods] came, tasted the food, and viewed our facility. And that was where we went from the restaurant business to supplying supermarkets. They expanded us to more stores, more regions. We grew our facility and I realized that I love growing this business in the wholesale format rather than the retail and that my original plan could be done in a different way. I can supply grab-and-go meals to every college campus. And that's still a goal.

You've been selling online since 2018 through Amazon Fresh. Tell us more about your online customer and how you capture this audience.

We launched Amazon Fresh in 2018 and it had a slow start, but last year really propelled things. Since we were already set up as a vendor, Amazon

Fresh was able to get our entire product line set up, and we realized a big shift in our customer base. People are eating at home and working from home. Cafe Spice fills that need with the solution of ready-to-eat, gourmet food at home. Since then, we've changed our marketing strategy, pushing a little bit more into social ads and keyword searches through Amazon to make sure we reach that clientele.

A lot of brands had to pivot when customers couldn't sample products in-store. What makes for a good online retail partner? And besides Amazon Fresh, which new online retail partners have you added to the mix?

The main thing is getting customer experience right—getting the product on time to the customer so that they have enough shelf life on it, that they're tasting the best quality product.

We've had a large keyword marketing campaign through Instacart. We launched with Kroger, the largest retailer in the country, which has its own online platform. And Hungryroot recently brought in our chicken burritos and our potato samosa small bites. They're looking to grow the partnership and we're going to keep evolving and putting more and more items on their platform.

A core pillar of the business is a healthy lifestyle. Tell us more about the importance of using locally sourced ingredients and working with local partners.

We're located in the Hudson Valley in New York state, and this area is really true to fresh ingredients. We use as many fresh, local ingredients as we can. Sustainability is very important to us. We're part of the Better Chicken Commitment, which means that we are using humanely raised animals.

Let's talk about brand discovery. Which channels have worked best to build brand awareness?

Direct-to-consumer has been amazing. A lot of New York transplants who are familiar with the brand from the restaurant days have moved all over

the country, and through Amazon Fresh and Instacart, we're able to get them the product. We get requests all the time saying, "Where can I find your product?" And this way, we've been able to get it to them. We've seen our grab-and-go sales triple.

We have to bring up the global supply chain and the issues surrounding it. We're seeing this in the news consistently, and it's a very real challenge, especially for those in the CPG industry. How has this impacted Cafe Spice?

It's impacted us in a big way. We're building a new facility and it's delayed, that's one big part of it. And the labor shortage is a real thing, and I don't know where it's going from here. But, because we're local, we're able to source our ingredients very easily. Some of our global ingredients take some time, but we're able to pivot into other items because we have a big menu set. So if there's something that's not available or out of stock, we are able to offer something else. We are lucky that we manufacture our own products, so we're able to control that.

Want to learn more about how Cafe Spice is driving new recipes for success? [Watch our video interview](#)

NIRVANA WATER SCIENCES' ALEX MATOS, MANAGING DIRECTOR

November 17, 2021



As a new bottled water brand on an already crowded shelf, Nirvana Water Sciences is leaning into its product “education and awareness” marketing phase. In a recent conversation, we spoke with Matos about this essential step in creating brand trust and recognition, and

what the brand is doing to teach prospective consumers about the benefits of its infused spring water.

Nirvana Water Sciences entered the market last spring and is positioned as a functional water product, meaning it offers an additional health benefit—in this case, muscle wellness. What sets Nirvana apart from its competitors?

The functional water space has overwhelmingly grown in the past three or four years. We're coming in as a defining functional water with our HMB-infused spring water. A lot of people are unfamiliar with HMB, which stands for beta-hydroxy beta-methylbutyrate. There's a lot of science behind how HMB boosts muscle performance, [improves] muscle recovery, and slows muscle degradation.

You mentioned that many consumers may be unfamiliar with HMB. How do you educate consumers on the science involved?

We're currently in our education and awareness phase, and we are working to communicate [the benefits of] HMB for our consumers and the audience that we're building. We're using athletes and professional athletes to leverage our content and communications back to our consumers.

The addition of HMB is sure to attract a very different type of customer. Tell us more about your target audience and which marketing channels have worked best to reach them.

Well, we [focus on being] for everybody, and every body. We don't single out any single demographic. We feel like everybody in the family could enjoy our infused spring water. We're doing a lot of Instagram content with our professional athletes and leveraging them to create content that communicates HMB in a cooler, simpler way for our consumers to engage with. Our influencer marketing strategy relies heavily on a roster of elite professional athletes. We have NBA player and founder-investor Kyle Lowry on our team. Kyle is leading the way to help us leverage content, educate our consumers, and put the word out about Nirvana Water Sciences. Moving forward, we're going into some TikTok content as well.

For a new brand in a competitive space, how do you build brand loyalty and retention?

Since we're currently in the education and awareness phase, we need to get bottles in people's hands. [We achieve] this through demos at retail, event activations, work at trade shows, and consumer-based events where we can potentially get in front of the consumer. We're working on some retailer promotions that will create loyalty for us in-store. We're looking to drive consumers into the store and pick up our brand and give us a second trial, not just the first trial. We want to create that repeat buyer and create that loyalty for our retailers.

Where does your direct-to-consumer (D2C) channel come into play?

D2C is a priority for us. Right now, we're working on establishing a strong D2C site with a simple customer experience and having that drive our ecommerce business. We're also on Amazon and Walmart.com. We currently have a “subscribe and save” subscription program with Amazon that has been going great. Building loyalty through Amazon and Walmart is another strategy for us. Amazon and Walmart provide two separate channels with two different audiences that are buying products online. And I think for us, it [has] built awareness, and some loyalty there, too.

Retail media is also something that's becoming more popular. How is retail media helping to inspire purchases?

Retail media has been great for us. We've been able to work with our retailer partners to do some geotargeting and geofencing advertising. They've loved the data that has come back from it and the results. And in return, we're getting more people to walk into stores and actually pick up our HMB-infused spring water. This helped when we weren't sampling live. We could use digital field marketing and get our consumers into the stores to purchase.

How has Nirvana had to reimagine its in-store presence?

We think a lot of our SKUs could live in different places within the retailer. For example, our HMB-infused water could possibly live in the sports drink aisle, or it could live in the supplements aisle, and you could also have it in the water aisle. So it gives us three points of interaction with the consumer. Now that retailers are open and foot traffic has returned, our sales team is out there activating and putting up displays, in-store signage, hosting demos, and working with retailers to better grow our brand and allow people to get to know Nirvana and the SKUs offered in our portfolio.

Want to learn more about how Nirvana Water Sciences builds brand loyalty and retention?

[Watch our video interview](#)

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