

Unseen by the consumer, your back of house (BOH) can make or break the retail or wholesale experience. Like the cogs in a machine, BOH employees, processes, systems and solutions must work seamlessly and tirelessly to shape the front of house proceedings as an essential part of your overall offering. What makes your kitchen and food preparation BOH work is a combination of zealous organisation, adaptability, knowledge, and experience.

From delivery and receiving through stockrooms and cold storage; your kitchen areas; service departments including bakery, butchery, fresh produce and deli, to cleaning, maintenance, health and safety – ensuring your BOH myriad moving parts run efficiently, smoothly and at optimum productivity means focusing on the finer details while also keeping an eye on the bigger picture.

For all back of house operations, automation, artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, and the internet of things (IoT) are making specified tasks easier, simpler, and more efficient. While these technologies and the upskilling of staff take time to implement the long-term benefits are many. For example, technology innovations in kitchen BOH equipment can help optimise operations by freeing up personnel for more hands-on tasks – and reducing wastage and human error. Keeping your BOH processes up to date with the best possible technology makes good business sense – and ensuring your staff are trained and knowledgeable is as important as taking advantage of technology to help organise and manage your BOH systems and operational requirements.

Behind the scenes

Back of house systems, equipment, solutions & innovations for FMCG retailers & wholesalers



Image by WangXiNa, www.freepik.com

The internet of things, or IoT, is a network of interrelated devices that connect and exchange data with other IoT devices and the cloud. IoT devices are typically embedded with technology such as sensors and software and can include mechanical and digital machines and consumer objects. Increasingly, organisations in a variety of industries are using IoT to operate more efficiently, deliver enhanced customer service, improve decision-making and increase the value of the business. <https://www.techtarget.com/iotagenda/definition/Internet-of-Things-IoT>

By geralt
from Pixabay,
www.canva.com

Organising your back of house

A chaotic BOH is bad for business. Mismanaged stock, breakage and wastage, frustrated employees and customers, and wasted time are not conducive to a pleasant or productive work environment. Taking advantage of technology to help organise and manage your BOH is as important as ensuring your BOH staff are trained, knowledgeable, and effective.





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An organised back of house is obviously important for a well-run front of house, and it has a direct impact on customer satisfaction.

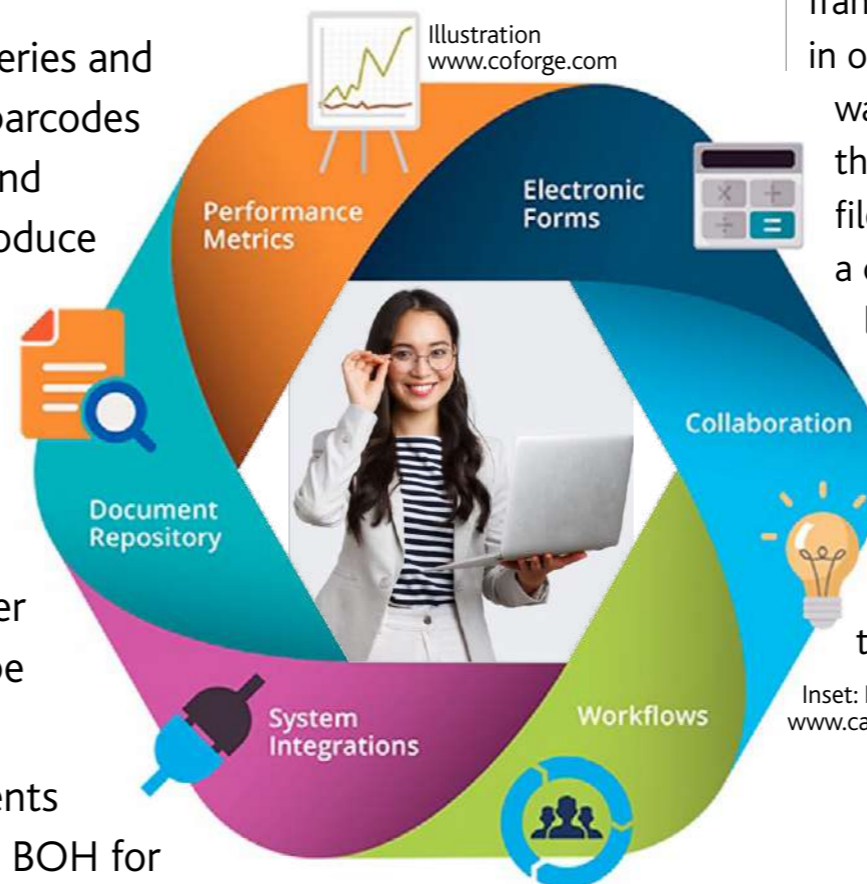
In terms of stock control, running out of stock is never a good thing, but being able to locate an item, even if it's at another branch, or being able to deliver stock quickly, can go a long way to fostering a happy relationship with your customers.

Having a shopper wait for a harried employee to search a disorganised stockroom with no success (and no solution) is a waste of time and can quickly damage a store's reputation.

This applies equally to independent stores, franchise model groups and centralised groups – in one instance, a chain store's returns counter

was piled high with boxes of stock (some open), the counter was piled high with paperwork and files, and the search in BOH (stockroom) for a click and collect order took an extraordinarily long time, by which time the queue consisted of seven very impatient customers. Back of house disorganisation had in this instance led to front of house problems. And of course, in the age of social media, word of mouth is more powerful than ever, for the good and the bad!

- Your kitchen BOH processes – from tracking deliveries and managing stock – are becoming easier as smart barcodes and RFID (radio frequency identification) labels and tags are the norm. With an integrated system, produce can be tracked from farm or manufacturer to point of sale.
- Using AI and machine learning, wastage and stock shortages can be managed much more efficiently. Although, when it comes to local celebrations, and real-time events such as weather disruptions, direct human intervention may still be necessary.
- Knowledge of products, categories, and departments is essential for stock management and a well-run BOH for your team, so make sure you have the right employees in place. Include effective training in handover processes, chain of command, and how to solve potential problems or navigate a crisis. Communication and education are an integral part of a successful BOH team.



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AT SCHOOL



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Product consistency and innovation for service departments

Suppliers of FMCG retailers and wholesalers spend billions on product research and development. They have to; it's a tough market out there and competition is fierce. For speciality service departments such as in-store delis and bakeries, as well as home meal replacements, heat and eat, and ready to eat products, consistency is non-negotiable. Your back of house food prep staff, kitchen assistants, cooks, bakers, and chefs all want to achieve the best possible results, but they must be able to rely on their ingredients and equipment. R&D in product development is making it easier to achieve consistent good quality, visual appeal, and the best taste and texture.

As your employees are expected to produce these results while keeping wastage to a minimum or even running their department as a profit centre, it cannot be overstated how important it is to keep upgrading your food service departments, and to keep up with the latest in products and ingredients, equipment, technology, and solutions. Your customers are also expecting more of you – continuous innovation and more choice from your range, as well as better taste, more convenience, improved health benefits, and the allure of a new experience. On the other hand, as costs rise across the board, improved efficiency, less wastage, and increased sales are crucial to business survival – and success. Relying on the trusted and true must be carefully balanced with moving forward and embracing the future.



CASE STUDY 1: Bakery back of house

Products that save time, work every time, and are easy to use are another must when it comes to bulk offerings in speciality areas such as the deli, HMR, butchery and bakery. Rich's, a family-owned food company based in Johannesburg, knows what it takes to keep food service customers happy.

The business has a presence in over 100 countries, and more than 400 product types, with customers ranging from in-store bakeries and restaurants to convenience stores and industrial clients.

Rich's introduced the first non-dairy whipped topping in 1945, and innovation remains at



<https://www.richs.co.za/>

the core of the business. That need to innovate and create remains unchanged today. As the company's website says, "Our dedicated and highly skilled in-house R&D team ensures we create valuable products that are a catalyst for our customers' success."

Behold the marvel of modern machinery: a fully automated machine that can weigh, price, wrap and label any item with robotic precision!



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Ishida WM-AI

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Rich's is known for several innovative products from pre-mixes and laminated doughs to icings, toppings, and ready-made goods. Their latest offerings include their pre-glazed freezer-to-oven Speedibake mini-Danish bakery selection, their multipurpose On Top Soft Whip topping – pourable, drinkable ready-to-use cold foam with a natural cream flavour and light texture – and a pre-proved 85g Chocolate Hazelnut Croissant. What these products offer is quality, reliability and trust, paired with efficiency and convenience. Products such as these make BOH preparation simpler and faster and can help to optimise time and effort.

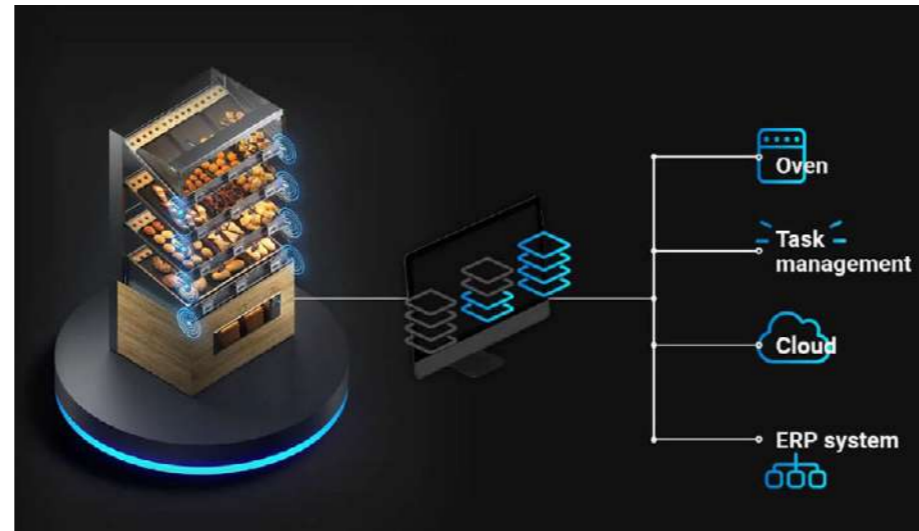
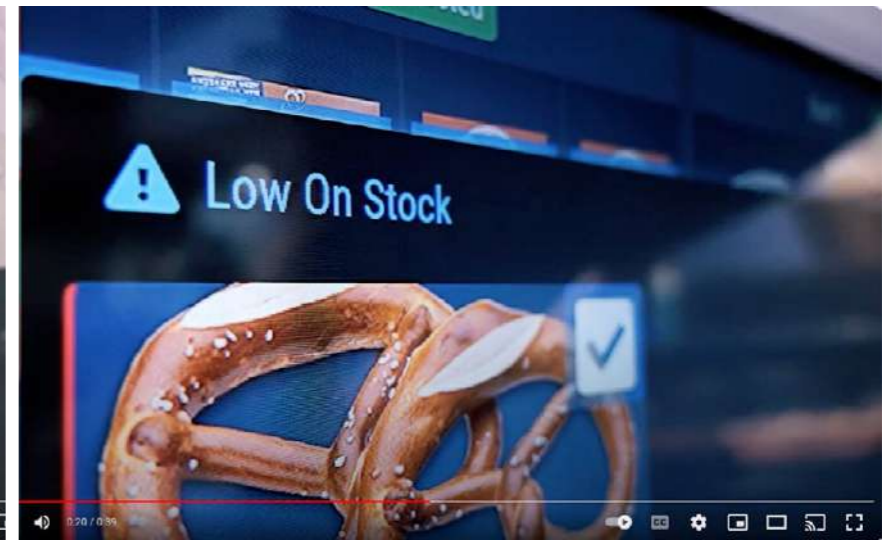
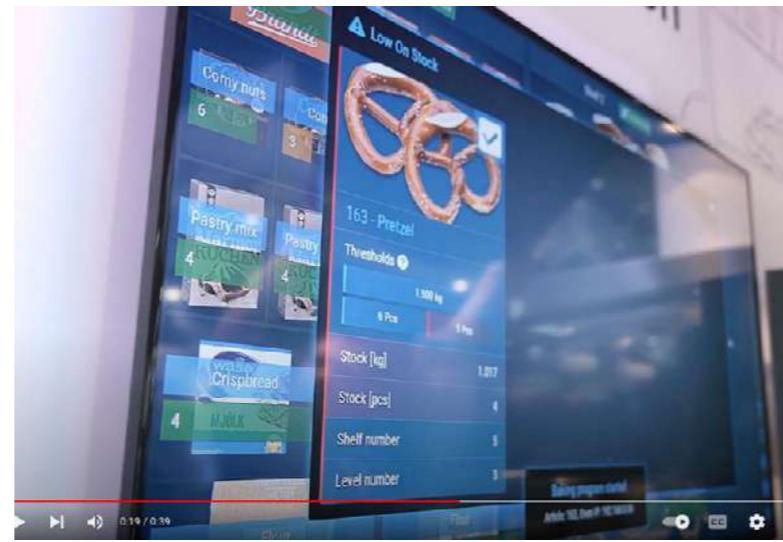
High tech solutions for a better kitchen experience

On the technology front in back of house, companies are investing in software and technology-enabled equipment to manage their processes and systems.

CASE STUDY 2: Baking equipment and technology

Recently launched in Europe, industrial weighing and labelling experts Bizerba's Smart Shelf is designed to reduce waste generated by overproduction. This intelligent rack is suited to baked goods, using weight sensors to detect when a product has been removed, while documenting the rack position.

Part of its smart functionality allows it to detect when a product, such as rolls, is running low. It then sends a signal to the automatic baking machine, which activates the appropriate baking programme for a predetermined quantity.



Bizerba uses AI to forecast sales based on recorded data, optimising the baking done over the course of the day. Prices on the racks can be dynamically adjusted and automatically updated by the system, a feature that could be used to sell off surplus stock before closing time instead of having to dispose of it as waste.

CASE STUDY 3: Technology advancements in food labels and scales

Store generated food labels and scales are part of your back of house operations and should be treated as such. For example, Super U, a French supermarket chain, has introduced QR codes

Bizerba's Smart Shelf is designed to reduce waste generated by overproduction. www.bizerba.com/

on food labels for customers who want to know that their purchases are sustainable. The chain uses Snapchat Stories to instantly share information about where the product came from and whether it was ethically grown, caught, or farmed.

Teraoka is another company that invests heavily in continual innovation and improvement. Their selection of scales, labels, and

wrapping systems offers advanced technology, precision, and fit-for-purpose solutions that are geared towards a fully customisable and integrated offering.

Electronic shelf labelling (ESL) offers real-time price updates for a streamlined and efficient shopping and stock management experience, while linerless labels provide a flexible, attractive, and customisable label solution with a lower total cost and reduced environmental impact.

“Bizerba offers hardware and software solutions for weighing, food inspection and labelling, including label material. In addition, there are digitalisation and automation solutions with



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the Bizerba BRAIN2 industrial software and the smart BRAIN2 apps for a wide range of applications. Bizerba also offers digitalisation and automation solutions with their Bizerba BRAIN2 industrial software and their smart BRAIN2 apps for a wide range of applications.”

Integrated systems that weigh, pack, wrap, and/or label are a gamechanger when it comes to minimising waste, increasing efficiencies, and removing human error from the equation. It’s all about finding better and faster ways of doing business. Teraoka says, “We always strive to create new standards for the market. Once they become commonplace, we go further and challenge ourselves to find a new balance.”

Bring the age of information to your back of house

In an article for Medium.com on *Emerging FMCG Trends in 2024*, business management consultants Strategii At Work says, “The FMCG industry is undergoing a profound transformation, driven by technological advancements and the imperative need for omnichannel strategies. In 2024, these trends are reshaping the landscape of the industry, presenting both challenges and opportunities for brands.”

AI, automation, and digital transformation are some of the most significant trends predicted to impact wholesalers and retailers globally in the coming years. The article states, “Digitalisation is revolutionising FMCG operations, from manufacturing to supply chain management.



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Automated processes, smart factories, and digital tools are enhancing efficiency and reducing costs. Real-time data insights are empowering decision-makers, allowing for quicker responses to market demands and ensuring a more agile and adaptive approach to business.”

Remaining flexible and up to date, understanding the risk and rewards, ROI and how much value the technology will add to your business is a balancing

act that local wholesalers and retailers need to perfect. Keeping an eye on international chains and trends is one of the easiest ways to determine what changes are likely to benefit your business. Given the pace of innovation across the board, those slow off the mark run the risk of falling so far behind, playing catch up will prove to be a mission impossible. Savvy businesses that keep up with the changes will find themselves entering a new and exciting era of retail and wholesale. **SR**

Tips for setting up your back of house

- Be compliant. Make sure you comply with all relevant regulations, including health and safety, food safety, and any other legislated or best practice regulations that may be relevant.
- Your equipment, solutions, and systems must be fit for purpose.
- Keep your grocery and premade divisions separate. For maximum efficiency and to prevent any potential problems, as well as ensuring you remain compliant for both of these categories, make sure you keep a clear division between your grocery and premade operations.

<https://metro.com/blog/back-of-house-storage-modern-grocery-operations-/>

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Ann Baker-Keulemans writes on topics related to business, lifestyle, technology, and health, with extensive knowledge on the SA retail and wholesale landscape. Contact annbk@wilkinsross.co.za | www.wilkinsrossglobal.com





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- Fits in a stand.



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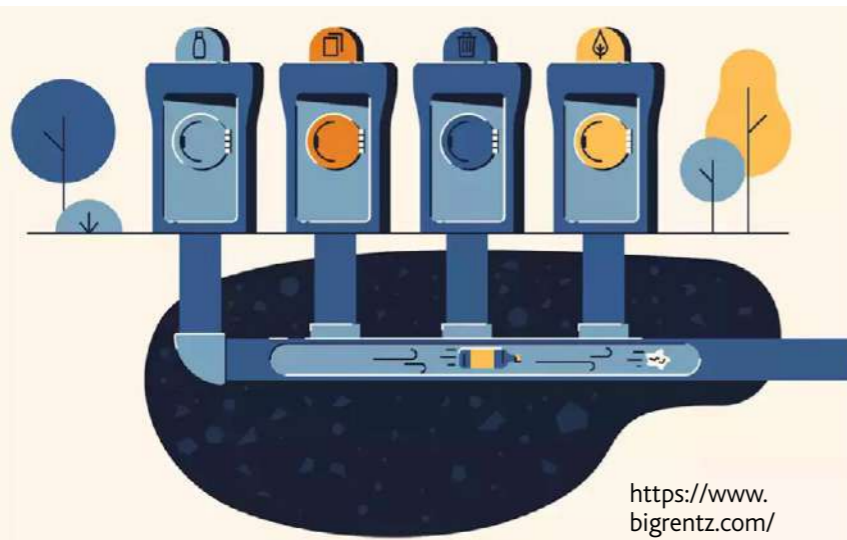
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<https://www.bigrentz.com/>

As populations grow in urban areas, so does the need for waste management solutions that can accommodate increasing amounts of trash. Some cities are taking on this challenge by installing pneumatic waste disposal bins that connect to an series of underground pipes. Trash travels through the pipes to a waste collection plant where it can be sorted or hauled away. This system eliminates the need for traditional waste collection, reduces energy costs and increases overall efficiency.



San Francisco diverts about 80% of its waste from landfills every year, and it boasts one of the highest recycling rates in the U.S. The city achieved this in part through its partnership with Recology, a waste collection company. Recology invested \$20 million into upgrading its facilities and installed a fleet of sorting robots to quickly and accurately sort recyclables.

These robots perform a series of tasks, including sorting out contaminants, recovering recyclable materials missed by traditional sorters and sorting black plastics that optical sorters can't identify into mixed-plastic bales. This not only ensures that more of San Francisco's materials are properly recycled, but also increases the quality and saleability of plastic bales. <https://www.bigrentz.com/>



Amsterdam is one of the most eco-conscious cities in the world. As part of its goal to reduce CO₂ emissions by 95% by 2050, the Dutch capital set out to upgrade its public waste collection system with smart technology. In 2014, the city added weighing mechanisms to some of its collection trucks and installed fill-level sensors in public trash bins. It then used the data to create more efficient, cost-effective waste collection schedules.

In 2020, researchers at MIT and AMS Institute unveiled a potential solution to clean up the piles of trash that still line Amsterdam's historic canals. Their concept, Waste Streams, would involve installing floating dumpsters in canals that can be collected and returned by autonomous boats. If the project is successful, the system will eliminate the need for curbside trash pickup in historic districts and provide a more energy-efficient alternative. <https://www.bigrentz.com/>



Songdo, South Korea was one of the first cities to implement a truck-free waste management system. It achieved this by installing bins connected to a series of underground pneumatic waste pipes that transport trash to a waste processing facility, where waste is automatically sorted and either recycled, buried or burned for energy.

Songdo's system was the first to eliminate the need for collection trucks by connecting every building in the city to the underground pipe system. This not only cut down on carbon emissions but also saved the city money. By 2014, the system only required seven workers to operate. <https://www.bigrentz.com/>