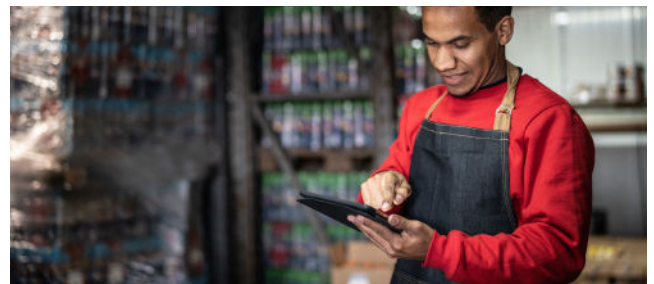
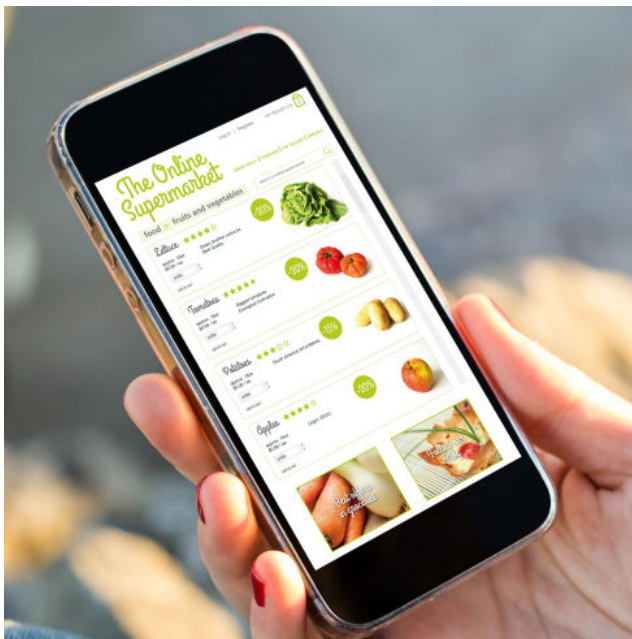


7 key considerations when choosing crates for grocery e-commerce



The online grocery sector is expanding at a rapid pace, with both home delivery and curbside pick-up proving increasingly popular in the U.S. To meet this shift in the way that consumers buy perishable goods like food and drink, grocery stores and other retailers must address a variety of storage, distribution and delivery challenges to maximize efficiencies, meet customer expectations and balance costs. One key factor is the selection of the most appropriate reusable containers as packaging has a significant impact on every aspect of the e-commerce process. Accordingly, here are seven key considerations when choosing crates for grocery e-commerce.

1.

Purpose-built crates support more efficient operations

Crates created specifically for the grocery e-commerce sector suit the requirements of a broad range of picking, packing and distribution methods. Historically, online orders have been fulfilled by teams of pickers in stores, and crates are explicitly designed for ease of movement and handling. More recently, though, supermarkets have invested in so-called 'dark stores' – large, warehouse-type facilities which are laid out for more streamlined route optimization. Dark stores are increasingly relying on higher levels of automation, using intelligent robots for picking and placing. Purpose-built crates are designed to be strong enough to protect what's inside and to be compatible with the automated warehouse systems that are essential to efficient operation.



2.

Crates designed to last

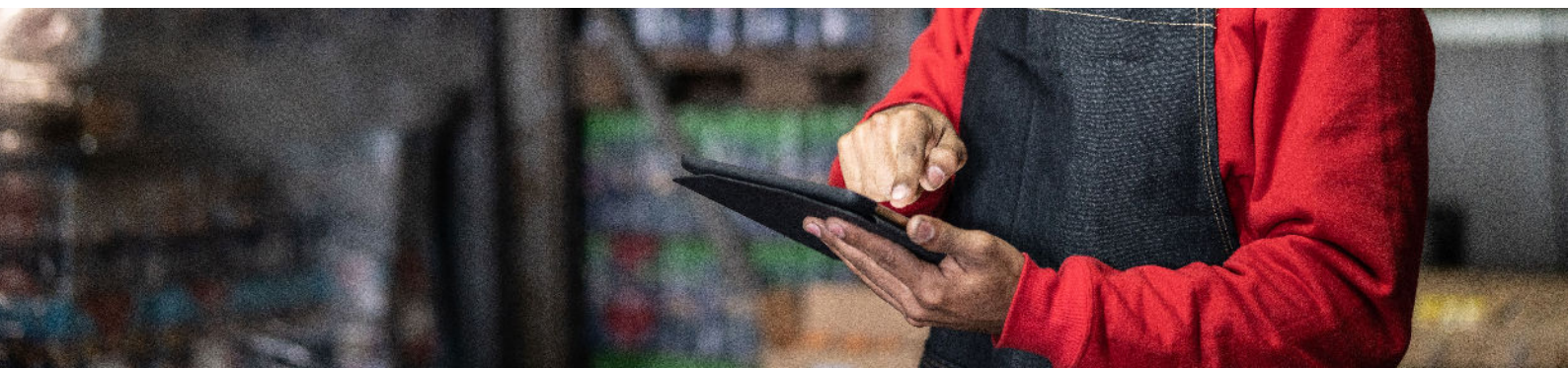
Reusable grocery crates must be lightweight, yet extremely durable as they are moved around the store and may make trips to homes, all day long. A well-designed crate goes through extensive research and development to deliver the optimal solution for grocery e-commerce. This results in a container which can endure the everyday bumps and rigors of the online grocery fulfillment process.



3.

Ergonomics and functionality save time and money

In terms of ergonomics and functionality, simple design enhancements make a big difference for customer fulfillment teams. Hooks on the top rim means that carrier bag can be attached inside the crate, keeping them open at all times. This means easier and faster goods picking in the warehouse or shop. Also, handholds on all four sides of the crate results in more convenient handling. Home shopping crates also reduce the impact of damaged packaging. For example, the use of a solid base ensures that any liquid spilt from contents such as a gallon of milk is contained, preventing spillage to the crates below and the subsequent spoil of the order. Purpose-built crates, therefore, reduce spoil and drive up profitability.



4.

Efficient Design With Storage in Mind

With recent dramatic increases in online orders, many grocery stores are being forced to handle thousands of unique orders when they were never designed to operate as fulfillment centers. Reusable grocery totes with the typical cramped grocery back room in mind are necessary to the success of an e-commerce plan. Retailers need durable containers that are strong enough to stack seven or eight high, allowing efficient storage of orders for curbside or home delivery. When empty, crates that are nestable or foldable require little storage space so they are out of the way until the next customer order.





5.

Sensors Monitor Food Conditions



Containers can be equipped with IoT sensors that allow for tracking throughout the supply chain. The greater visibility can result in less crate loss and to monitor food conditions. Sensors attached to e-commerce crates ensure that perishable goods remain within specified temperature/humidity parameters while in transit, making sure they reach customers in optimum condition..



6.

Reusable crates eliminate single-use materials

Designed explicitly with grocery e-commerce and curbside pick-up in mind, reusable crates eliminate much of the corrugated associated with e-commerce. Indeed, sustainability will become an even greater consideration in the future, with consumers wanting to know that the materials used to make reusable crates can be recycled and kept out of landfills. That's why Tosca is committed to establishing effective recycling programs – for example deploying initiatives where old crates are bought back from retailers and ground up so that the base materials can be re-used in future crate production.



7.

High-quality crates support brand loyalty

The act of online shopping takes the user away from the in-store experience and associated exposure to the retailer's brand. For a company looking to ensure its brand and its values remain front and centre of its online services, bespoke and branded crates have a role to play in the overall customer experience. This is one of the reasons behind the growth in the use of more natural 'wood-look' crate designs, not least from niche online businesses entering the grocery e-commerce sector and supplying, for example, organic produce boxes from local suppliers. The appearance and finish of crates, along with logos and graphics, play a major role in supporting a retailer's brand equity.



Several important factors need to be considered when selecting a suitable crate for online e-commerce. To find out more, visit our website at tosca.co.uk/e-commerce.

