Grocery and restaurant chains build their reputations on their ability to consistently deliver the fresh, premium quality foods that consumers demand. In recent years, a new food-related phenomenon has emerged: The prevalence of made-to-order food offerings is permeating every corner of the retail market.

This “food everywhere” trend brings with it some key operational considerations. Participating retailers must have the infrastructure in place to preserve food quality, lest they may face the consequences of a tarnished reputation and associated regulatory complications. And while many retailers are publicly stating corporate sustainability objectives as part of their brands, extending these principles to all facets of their operations can be challenging.

The increasing utilization of technology is helping retailers address these challenges and meet these objectives. New electronic facility supervisory systems offer an internet of things (IOT) approach to everything from automated temperature monitoring to controls that ensure a comfortable store environment.

With consumer preferences driving the food everywhere trend throughout retail, here is a look at some key considerations:

**Food safety**

One of the biggest challenges retailers face is ensuring food safety. As the surging “foodie” culture is quick to review their dining experiences online and in social channels, the assurance of food quality and prevention of food-borne illnesses have become important in protecting a food retailer’s brand reputation.

As a result, more retailers are relying on technology to automate processes and the systems responsible for monitoring, managing, recording and reporting on food conditions throughout cold chain transportation and storage.
Retailers ensuring food safety has always been about meeting regulations and achieving compliance with local food codes, but now more than ever it’s essential to preserving the consumer experience. Because food safety issues are detrimental from both financial and brand reputation standpoints, more companies are making technology investments to comply with regulations and effectively grow their position as trusted retailers and purveyors of premium dining experiences.

These technologies are designed to offer connected solutions that automate the capture, collection and validation of temperature related information at every stage of the cold chain journey — from the supplier to the ultimate point of sale. Through the use of hand-held thermometers, advanced sensors, and automated temperature monitoring and management systems, retailers are working to make the necessary investments to ensure food safety and deliver more consistent hot and cold food-holding temperatures.

Improved facility optimization to create comfortable, consistent consumer experiences

In a market driven by experiential retail, providing premium quality food offerings is only half the battle. It’s as important for retailers to create inviting, comfortable and safe environments for consumers to interact with their brands — and deliver on each factor in this equation consistently.

To do so, retailers are turning to the next generation of facility management and building automation systems that help ensure the reliable performance of coolers, freezers, HVAC and lighting services. Through advanced electronic controls, these supervisory systems help retailers optimize in-store environments and improve the consumer experience in a variety of ways:

- Lighting that highlights featured areas of a facility;
- HVAC automation that provides enhanced comfort by making cold aisles or hot food-preparation areas more pleasant; and
- Automated environmental controls that create ideal dining areas.

This technology is also helping retailers address their sustainability goals by improving energy efficiencies, reclaiming heat for reuse and recycling and/or waste stream reduction. Not only is this helping retailers reduce operating costs, it’s allowing them to promote a “good neighbor” story that helps drive consumers to their stores.

Regardless of the food retail format, not being able to get a specific item due to mechanical equipment failure is very frustrating from a consumer perspective. By allowing equipment downtime to interrupt the delivery of favorite consumer items, retailers could not only lose sales, but face the potential of permanently losing customers.

Facility and equipment monitoring technology provides the connectivity needed to help assure an “always available” environment that helps provide the consumer delight that keeps them coming back — and not switching to a competitor’s brand.

Technology needed to enable “food everywhere” trend

An important part of meeting the demand for “food everywhere” potentially requires fail-safe food preservation strategies. Retail operators and their suppliers should manage temperatures and ensure food quality along every step to the journey to the consumer.

To appeal to the growing “foodie” culture and capitalize on this trend, retailers and their suppliers may require specific tools throughout the cold chain and in their retail outlets. Temperature monitoring and facility management technologies will become increasingly imperative to help them ensure food quality and create the consistent dining experiences that today’s consumers demand.