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Tribeca Whole Foods Takes Shopping Personal

By Aline Reynolds



Gerlinde Gentzke, one of Whole Foods' two concierges at its Tribeca location, which is piloting a "personalized shopping" program.

Shopping recently became a whole lot easier at the Whole Foods Market in Tribeca.

It's the only Whole Foods in New York City that now offers a personalized shopping program that works as a grocery-gathering and delivery service for residents south of 14th Street, eliminating the need for a trip to the store.

Once consumers visit the store to complete a personal profile and give their credit card information — the only available method of payment for the service — they can call or e-mail the store concierge to place orders.

The staff will then select the groceries and have them delivered to the consumer's door within four hours of the request. Consumers are charged for the price of the goods plus a \$10 service fee.

"You don't have to stand in line or go to the store... you can just stay at home, and we'll do your shopping for you," said Gerlinde Gentzke, one of the store's two concierges.

Most of the time, Gentzke and her colleague, Ian O'Donnell, receive e-mail requests of generic ingredients such as orange juice, eggs or two percent milk, and they'll decide which brands to pick based on information stored in the customers' profiles.

The profiles contain their general food preferences — organic versus original, for example — special dietary concerns and food allergies.

"Have a gluten-intolerant family member? Living a vegan lifestyle? We'll do the homework and label reading for you to track down the latest products that match your needs," according to the personalized

shopping hand-out. The program also offers grains, spices and other pantry selections according regional, flavor-oriented themes, such as Mediterranean, Continental or Asian.

Customers can additionally ask for specific brands of their liking, such as 365 Everyday Value and others that Whole Foods offers.

“It looks like a normal shopping list,” Gentzke said. “I love it. I love getting people what they want.”

Steven Marion, Whole Foods Tribeca’s marketing team leader, said the program has proven “very successful” thus far. “Sometimes, people are just busy, and sometimes the stores get overcrowded, especially if you just need a few items,” he said.

Typically, customers use the service to complement, rather than supplant, their weekly grocery runs. “It’s nice to have that other option,” said Marion. “If they’re having guests for dinner and need a few more things, they can kind of have it ready for them when they get back home.”

Downtown residents who are too ill to leave their apartments or who are attending to sick family members especially benefit from the food deliveries.

O’Donnell and Gentzke also prepare customized care packages for shoppers wishing to send friends or family congratulatory or condolence food gifts. The packages range from \$15 to \$300, and can include anything from Whole Foods hot meals to nutrition supplements to body care products.

Unlike the personalized shopping service, “It’s best if [customers] come in, so they have a tangible idea of what they’re giving to someone,” said O’Donnell.

The personalized shopping program, introduced last November, began as a pilot, only making deliveries to 101 Warren Street, The Solaire, Truffles Tribeca and The Visionaire residences.

Residents of the Visionaire, at 70 Little West Street in Battery Park City, sought grocery delivery service and recommended the idea to Whole Foods.

As of early February, the service was expanded river-to-river, up to 14th Street.

For now, Whole Foods Tribeca is the only branch that offers the service. O’Donnell said it’s up to each store to “see if it’s profitable and if there’s a customer demand for it.”

The store will soon be delivering groceries to Downtown Jersey City, since it is the closest Whole Foods to the area. And, in the next two months, deliveries will start to be made by bicycle rather than van.

“We already have [employees] who are excited about it,” said Marion, since several members of the store’s delivery team bike to and from work.

It can take “forever,” Marion said, for the deliverymen and women to cross West Broadway by car while en route to a customer’s apartment in the Seaport or Wall Street. By bike, he said, it’ll be “easier to get around, better for the environment and less expensive, since we wouldn’t have to pay for both [truck] leases and gas.”