

By CHRIS ERIKSON

June 16, 2008

Touting the benefits of losing weight and eating well only goes so far when your workplace vending machine is crammed with candy and potato chips. So some companies are taking steps to replace the junk food with something more wholesome, or at least offer some healthier options.

"There's definitely a demand for healthier items, from all sorts of workplaces," says Bill Martin, director of operations for VendingManhattan.com, which in the past few years has fielded growing demand for Slim-Fast bars, unsalted nuts, dried fruits and the like.

Companies that offer on-site cafeterias are offering healthier choices - and in some cases giving employees a nudge by charging less for them than more fattening fare.

Meanwhile, FreshDirect's office delivery service has grown to thousands of clients in New York, and business is likewise booming for The FruitGuys, a California-based company that started offering office-fruit-delivery service here a year and a half ago.

"A lot of companies talk about wellness and healthy eating, but now they're making it accessible to employees," says Larry Pearl, FreshDirect's business-development director, who sees a trend toward "portion-controlled" snack sizes, as well as morning-meeting platters stocked with fruit and granola instead of bagels and muffins.

FreshDirect has started offering vending machines stocked with healthy meals, and has staff nutritionists who consult with office administrators to guide their purchasing.

In addition to keeping corn-syrup intake down, healthier snacks can be a valued perk. The FruitGuys first caught on among Silicon Valley dot-com firms who saw fresh fruit as a bone to throw workers, says CEO Chris Mittelstaedt. But interest grew "when people started to realize that putting fruit in the office actually had an impact on people's health," he says. "Companies are more conscious of these things than they used to be."

