

# rodmellON:



Founded: 1985 | Headquarters: Santa Clarita, CA | Current Store Count: 59 | Growth Plans: 100 stores by 2030

rodmell & company

## Vallarta® Supermarkets: More than authentic.

In a sea of conventional grocery chains, Vallarta Supermarkets stands out as a cultural beacon – one that honors heritage and cuisine through an experiential format. As a first-time shopper at Vallarta Supermarkets and a Mexican food enthusiast (who's not Hispanic), I walked in on a Tuesday lunchtime expecting something very niche but left feeling deeply connected.

This report details my experience at Vallarta's Modesto location, weaving observations that highlight how this retailer successfully presents a brand point of view through thoughtful, well-designed experiences and expands appeal through meaningful moments and sensory cues.

I'll map my assessment to key stages of the shopping journey – approach, entry, departmental discovery, assortment, promo, and checkout – along the way tying in my perspectives on merchandising and communications, focusing on how Vallarta's product curation and messaging deliver on their emotional brand attributes and value proposition.

**The result?** A strategically driven shopping experience that inspires discovery and fosters loyalty, proving great retail must be more than authentic to deliver relevant moments for diverse communities.



**“Opening this new location is more than just expanding our business – it's about creating a space where the community can come together over fresh, quality ingredients and authentic flavors.”**

**Lizette Gomez,**  
*Director of Marketing,  
Vallarta Supermarkets  
From Progressive Grocer Jan, 2025*

## 1 Arrival: Setting expectations.

Pulling into Vallarta's parking lot, the whimsical logo whispered "fiesta," but also sparked assumptions of chaos and visual clutter. The palm tree-laden branding, evoking a casual Mexican eatery, initially felt too playful, potentially narrowing perceptions for non-Hispanic shoppers like me. Yet, I'm open to the idea that it could be serving as a clever gateway, using familiar cultural icons to invite curiosity without exclusion. Despite my perception of the brand identity, the clean facade

avoids overcomplication with its straightforward design and strong modern structure, shaping positive impressions. Additionally, the entry could benefit from color and energy, be it window graphics or exterior merchandising displays to reflect the experience that lies within.

The arrival moment is that first handshake with your customer – memorable signals that can build or diminish emotional ties.

**Exterior store hygiene can lift conversion from parking lot into store by 8-12%.**

*IRI foot-traffic studies*





## 2 Entry: Moment of truth.

Stepping through the front doors into the vestibule, Vallarta's Day of the Dead display enveloped me like a cultural hug – vibrant, intriguing, and open to all, transforming a Tuesday lunchtime into a shared celebration of heritage. This bold seasonal activation – featuring curated products like candles, baked goods, and spirits – creates instant excitement into the experience ahead. It's a standout example of a narrative in heritage delivering warmth through cultural enrichment.

I view displays like this as a strong driver of emotional engagement, transcending demographics. My own connection deepened through discovery, as the display educated and reflected cultural traditions.

**Cultural displays drive 20-25% uplift in impulse add-ons during peak periods like holidays.**

*NielsenIQ (NIQ) holiday/seasonal event data*





A



B



C

### 3 Departments: Designed for impact.

Just beyond the vestibule, a thoughtfully merchandised floral department (A) greets visitors with an array of seasonal plants, fresh-cut bouquets, balloons, and cards – strategically positioned between the entrance and checkout. This curated selection, both familiar and distinctive, creates a boutique-like destination. Overhead beam structure and clear department signage delineate the space with seamless access to checkout on the opposite side – an intentional design facilitating efficient tasks like shopping for last-minute gifts.

Looking up and into the store, a striking guacamole bar commands attention (B), anchoring the sightline and inviting

exploration. This vibrant live station, where team members' hands-on preparation with fresh citrus and ingredients amplifies the guacamole bar's authenticity and appeal and sets the tone for the shopping experience ahead.

The view toward the back of the store (C) radiates energy and inspiration, evoking a bustling marketplace. Specialty stations like La Cocina and Panaderia, marked by bold signage, enhance the marketplace vibe with authentic offerings. From floor to ceiling, graphics and product presentations, designed with striking scale and detail, deliver an immersive experience in retail theater.

**Live demo  
stations drive  
3.5X impulse  
purchase rate  
for featured  
items.**

POPAI





A

The store's design immediately impresses with strong sightlines that ensure effortless navigation. The strategic use of scale, filling vertical space, creates an inviting open environment for shoppers – a principle exemplified by the vibrant Fresh Catch department (A). Here, a vivid array of seafood is meticulously showcased in pristine cases, with strategic lighting accentuating the freshness of shrimp, fish, and other seafood, flowing seamlessly around the perimeter to maintain a cohesive yet dynamic atmosphere.



B

Wide aisles, accented by minimal floor displays, enhance the space, keeping it super organized and clean, as seen in the expansive Carne Fresca section (B) where the spacious layout offers a wide variety of cuts, enhanced by clear signage and neatly arranged meats dominating the view.



C

Further along, the packaged meat presentation (C) features pre-packaged entrées designed for home preparation, offering an authentic twist with Mexican meals that stand out for their quality and variety – evident in the well-stocked shelves and front-facing



D

packages. Consistent cleanliness across departments, from seafood to produce, reinforces a polished and inviting shopping experience.

**Wide, uncluttered aisles and pristine cases reduces shopper friction resulting in +7% basket size and +11% visit frequency.**

*Dunnhumby path-to-purchase*

There is not much to offer as a critique of this store. The fantastic merchandising and attention to detail extends to the produce department (D), where an impactful macro graphic stretches across the perimeter. The ocean sunset mural, while striking, feels slightly out of place in landlocked Modesto, prompting my curiosity about its intended message and role in framing the fresh fruits and vegetables below.



## 4 Assortment: More is more.

The service experience seamlessly integrates throughout each food service station, offering a thoughtful array of options that enhance the shopping journey. As seen in the bustling Panadería (bakery) (A) and Frutas Frescas (fresh cut fruit) (B) sections, vibrant colors create an inviting atmosphere, reflecting a diverse spectrum of tastes.

**“La Cocina”** – the kitchen inside every Vallarta Supermarket (C) – offers a variety of traditional favorites from Mexico and Central America for breakfast, lunch or dinner, so you can stop in for a quick meal or snack before or after you shop.

Digital signage and menu boards were prevalent throughout these stations. They were thoughtfully designed and well-intended to guide customer choice with clarity, driving conversion.







The prepared foods offering was quite impressive (A, B, C). The grab-and-go selections shown above provide an endless variety of options where each station delivers a distinct cultural flavor. "La Cocina Rápida" inside every Vallarta Supermarket serves up quick, authentic dishes like tamales and fresh entrées, perfect for an on-the-go meal anytime.

**Prepared meals increase afternoon/evening visits by 25-30% by fulfilling "quick dinner" needs.**

*Circana data on mission-based shopping*



The seating area (D) is placed conveniently within the marketplace providing a versatile space where customers can dine in or take a break from shopping. Available seating invites dwell time and further reinforces accessibility and inclusivity of the brand.

**In-store dining correlates to 18% higher weekly spend**

*FMI foodservice study*



After a quick review of the Vallarta website, the option to order online and pick up in store or have prepared food delivered is prevalent, although I didn't see this messaging presented in the store.





A curated assortment shapes a bold retail identity, defining what Vallarta stands for. Strategic shop destinations emerge in every department, driven by high-impact displays that use scale and repetition to captivate shoppers. In produce (A), clear bins showcase an abundant and vibrant spectrum of fresh fruits and vegetables, reinforcing quality and urging customer choice.

Innovative visual merchandising transforms the center of store to an easy to shop and engaging product display, from La Dulcería's colorful candy presentation (B) reflecting a vibrant Mexican sweet tradition to the cereal aisle's (C) neatly bagged products with shelf talkers boost visual appeal and ease of navigation.

Dried peppers in open bins (D) and Mexican pottery on wood shelves (E) infuse the floor with authentic texture and intrigue, elevating the shopping experience, product discovery and conversion.

**Tactile/ethnic displays increase dwell and units by 12-16% in produce/ethnic aisles.**

*Neuratum's X-MAP studies (14% avg. category uplift)*





A



C



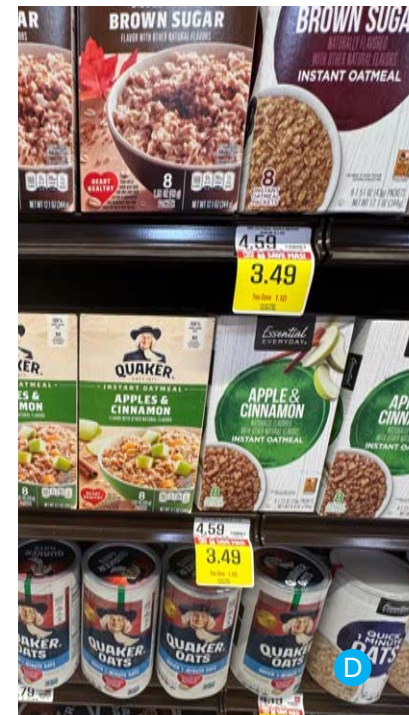
B

5

## Private Label: Trust through quality.

Vallarta's private label goods span categories like pantry staples, spices, hot sauces, and ready-to-eat items (e.g., custom salsas or yogurts from their Cremeria) which build on Vallarta's strengths in fresh, traditional foods. It appears that Vallarta's focus for their value offering is more on fresh and department-specific "exclusives" (like original Carne Asada) than packaged goods. This aligns with their in-house production like daily-baked sweet breads and fresh tortillas (A, B) where they offer exclusive, high-quality alternatives to national brands at lower prices, that emphasize authenticity and value.

Vallarta buys Essential Everyday (C, D) which is a value-oriented private brand offering affordable everyday groceries, household items, and pantry staples. It is sold at independent and regional grocery stores that partner with United Natural Foods, Inc. (UNFI), the brand's distributor.



D



## 6 Marketing: Amplify the moment.

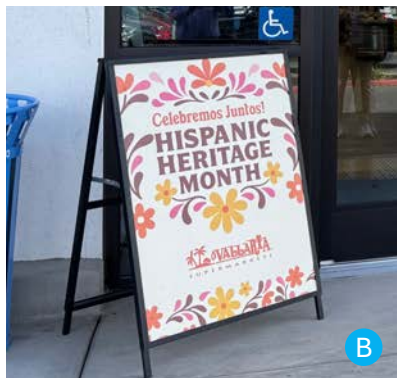
Vallarta's Hispanic Heritage Month activations weave celebration into the everyday shopper's path, from the welcoming "¡Celebremos Juntos!" easel at entry (B) to vibrant endcap display (A) stocked with heritage-inspired snacks like chilis and traditional treats. A standout floor decal, ringed with sponsor brands from Nestlé to Coca-Cola, anchors the space as a cultural touchpoint – honoring Latino stories with subtle, inclusive energy. A smart amplification of the event through product promotions is seen on the digital screens in La Cocina (C).

**Sponsored in-store events yield 3-5X return on media investment through partner-funded lifts in awareness/ sales.**

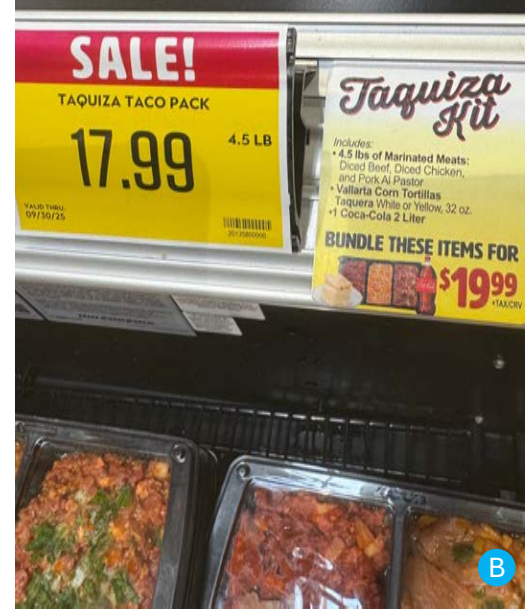
*General P2PI benchmark*



When I think back to the experience upon entry, there was a missed opportunity to bring this narrative to life in the vestibule. What currently feels like a bit like a drop zone without intention, could be an inspired area of discovery and impulse shopping. With a little planning this space should support the marketing messages in a bigger way or be utilized to activate brands to seize off-shelf space in supporting the in-store marketing themes.







## 7 Promo: The value equation.

Vallarta turns savings into a celebration – ‘Save Mas Daily’ lights up the aisles (A). The vibrant yellow "Save Mas Daily" signage, simple and easy-to-read, reinforces value at the shelf – a dynamic promotional strategy that blends cultural resonance with everyday value. The striking yellow signage, featuring a playful piggy bank motif, grabs attention and ties discounts to a festive vibe, making value easy to spot. Clear price reductions, reinforce this promise in every category.

Vallarta is winning with unique meal kits that add value to their shopper's day. Authentic meals, like the Taquiza Kit (B), are mindfully pre-packaged and bundled at an accessible price, offering a convenient family meal solution.

The digital kiosk's rotating CPG ads (C) demonstrate Vallarta's approach to in-store media, creating a dynamic touchpoint that cycles through offers from national brands and store promos, enhancing the in-store experience and enticing conversion.

**Meal kit bundles increase add-on attachment up to 2.5x by simplifying decisions.**

*General NIQ data*





## 8 Checkout: The final impression.

At Vallarta's checkout, impulse items on ice and friendly faces offering product samples tempt you to try something new, turning my exit into a warm goodbye – proving every touchpoint nurtures the community it serves. Wide aisles and clear exit signage ensure a hassle-free departure, reinforcing Vallarta's focus on a seamless end-to-end experience.

Convenient grab-and-go options are punctuated across the front end. Here, precut fruit bowls (A) are merchandised with the classic seasoning, Tajin, for an authentic twist on taste and include pre-taped forks for

convenience without additional clutter. Fresh horchata and fresh-squeezed juices (B) are also available at checkout in case you missed the opportunity in the department.

Colorful cash wraps (C) carry the brand theme, with sampling while queuing, and associates – friendly, conversational, helpful – make the experience more human (D). A seamless checkout experience boosts satisfaction, where service points deliver hospitality and authenticity. Positive experiences like these enhance loyalty across all shopper segments.

**When reducing friction with optimized impulse items (like grab-and-go) there is an average lift of \$1.50-\$2.00 in transaction value.**

*BlueSnap index*



# From niche to universal, Vallarta® Supermarkets master inclusive authenticity.

Reflecting on my visit to Vallarta Supermarkets in Modesto, what struck me most was the impeccable cleanliness and organization that permeated every corner of the store. From the spotless facade that set a welcoming tone upon arrival to the wide, uncluttered aisles and meticulously arranged departments, Vallarta demonstrated a commitment to a polished environment. This level of order not only facilitated effortless navigation but also elevated the overall shopping journey, making it feel efficient and inviting for diverse shoppers, regardless of background.

The experience unfolded like a carnival of senses, where vibrant colors, enticing aromas, and dynamic sounds created an immersive celebration of Mexican heritage. The entry's Day of the Dead display with its bold visuals and curated products set the tone on entry, while food service areas like La Cocina and the guacamole bar tantalized with fresh preparations and lively team interactions. Merchandise displays, from the colorful La Dulceria to open bins of dried peppers and pottery, added layers of texture and intrigue, transforming routine grocery shopping into a sensory adventure that deepened my connection and sparked discovery at every turn.

Ultimately, Vallarta's solid brand point of view – rooted in authenticity – shone through its food service and merchandise strategies. By blending traditional favorites in La Cocina with innovative grab-and-go options and thoughtfully curated products that honor cultural roots while appealing broadly, the store fosters loyalty and relevance at every turn. This approach proves that great retail transcends mere authenticity, delivering meaningful moments that resonate with communities and inspire repeat visits.

**Cultural/experiential retail formats increase trial among non-traditional shoppers by up to 20% through higher engagement and repeat visits.**

*NC Solutions (now Circana)*



Staci Mandrell serves as Executive Vice President at Rodmell & Company. If you are interested in learning more about their approach to exceptional retail experiences, please contact her.

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