



## Rouses Markets embarks on ambitious expansion with help from Hussmann

*How the two companies worked together to create custom solutions*

### Problem

After nearly 50 years in business, Louisiana-based supermarket Rouses embarked upon an ambitious expansion plan. The foundations of their business, fresh and local food from a community-minded family owned retailer, had become broader national trends but they also knew their Cajun-centric offerings set them apart locally. To make an impression in these new markets, as well as simplify and streamline expansion projects, Rouses recognized the need for a partner to help design and maintain quality display cases that could be included in the plans of these new stores. Not only was quality important, but access and serviceability once installed was paramount as the company had been experiencing difficulties with their previous provider.

### Solution

Having worked with other refrigeration and display companies, Rouses decided to work exclusively with Hussmann to design and develop custom display cases for the company's fresh food offerings, which are displayed front-and-center as customers walk into their locations. Working with Hussmann, Rouses designed these cases to match their aesthetic needs – including stainless steel, vertical glass and the ability to seamlessly place them together for a cohesive look. They've also worked with Hussmann to outfit every other refrigeration need throughout the stores.

### Result

The custom display cases are central to the first impression, described by Rouses as “fresh, in your face,” made as customers enter Rouses. Beyond that, the ability to design custom cases and account for them in the foundational design of all future stores, coupled with the delivery of the cases both on time and on budget, has sped up the expansion process. Because of this success, Rouses has experienced 40 percent growth in four years. By working exclusively with Hussmann for all of their display case needs, they've also reduced downtime in instances where maintenance and service are required.





When Rouses Markets first opened its doors in 1960, the Louisiana-based business was built on a foundation of principles its owners truly believed in: Fresh, local food sold by community-minded family ownership. For the Rouses, the family who founded the supermarket chain, it just seemed like the right way to do things. So, when “fresh” and “local” became the most popular words on end-cap aisle displays, Rouses didn’t see this as a new trend. It seemed more like everyone else was catching up.

As customer preferences shifted, Rouses Markets saw a continually growing interest in the principles that had always driven their business. The company knew these areas of focus positioned them for success, especially in the Cajun-centric culture of their Gulf South communities. Confident they could offer what customers were valuing, the company began an ambitious expansion project. Rouses Markets started 2016 with less than 50 locations and currently stands at 64 locations with two more under construction.

“Our products and offerings really meet the preferences of folks living in the Gulf South,” said Charles Merrell, Vice President of Real Estate at Rouses Markets.

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Every new store we’ve added in this region has really been taken on well by the local community, so it was a natural progression to push that forward in Louisiana where you don’t see a lot of national players with a strong presence.

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**Charles Merrell**

Vice President of Real Estate at Rouses Markets

## Specific plans require specific solutions

With detailed plans designed to cater to specific needs, the company knew a color-by-numbers method of display and refrigeration solutions wouldn’t suit their needs. The aim was to move the focus of the market away from the center-store into service, prepared foods and fresh, natural and organic options.

“We want to be fresh, in your face, when you walk through our door,” Merrell said.

Rouses knew they needed a collaborator to help design a prototypical store the company could use as a basis for its future locations during the expansion process that would still provide the customer experience associated with Rouses Markets. They looked at various companies before ultimately deciding to utilize the services of Hussmann in designing customized refrigeration and display cases.

Jim Preston had worked with Hussmann in previous positions before joining Rouses as the director of construction.

"I reflected on the ease and ability of service, the information I knew they could provide, the solutions for what we were looking for and the quality of the case while still maintaining the same – or better – that we would get for cost," Preston said. "That's what drove us in that direction."

## Recognizing – and relieving – pain points

Rouses had already been utilizing Hussmann merchandisers in other areas of the store but had, for years, been working with another company on the stainless steel and glass display cases near the front of the store that provided customers with that immediate impression of freshness as they entered. There were some concerns regarding those display solutions as the company moved forward with its plans for expansion and, based on Preston's previous experience with Hussmann, they began a dialogue with the company that would lead to the creation of custom cases to meet their specific needs.

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We worked with Hussmann to design a set of specialty cases that met our aesthetics but also provided a higher quality solution that were delivered on time and on budget.

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**Jim Preston**

Director of Construction at Rouses Markets

## Putting all your eggs in one basket

Along with meeting the aesthetic expectations of the team at Rouses, these custom cases were designed to meet specific standards of durability and visibility, utilizing lots of vertical glass that would allow customers with a clear view



of product offerings. Both durability and serviceability were also key considerations for Rouses as they worked with Hussmann to develop these cases, though those qualities are not customer-facing.

"These cases are a signature piece of our store plans and they get a lot of use," Merrell said. "We needed them to meet both standards of looks and durability."

From wall to wall, every new and remodeled Rouses location is fitted with Hussmann solutions including core cases for produce, meat, dairy and other products. By working with Hussmann to meet all of their needs, Rouses has found it easy to coordinate not just serviceability and maintenance, but also coordination and the supply chain.

"We have one person of contact to voice any opinions or discussions regarding design and changes," Preston said. "The Hussmann team set themselves apart from other vendor companies by showing a level of trust, commitment and authentic care towards supporting Rouses long term growth strategy. That's why it works."

"Otherwise, we wouldn't be putting all our eggs in one basket."

## Adjusting to COVID-19

In addition to being highly responsive, both Merrell and Preston said the Hussmann team has been receptive to feedback. According to both, this remains true throughout the entire process, from design and installation to service and maintenance. Still, nothing could've prepared anyone for what was around in the corner in March, 2020.

As the company continued its plans for expansion, the entire world was impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak. This has meant taking a second look at their custom cases, after installation, from a new perspective. Specifically, asking themselves what customers and employees will need to be safe as communities return to a new sense of normal.

"We're working on making the cases either full- or self-service and being able to convert them depending on the situation so that we can meet the needs of the stores and maintain the offerings our customers have come to expect and love," Preston said.

The company, with Hussmann, has reassessed their hot food and salad bars to also consider safety-guards such as the ability to have them sanitized more regularly as concerns over contagions are in the forefront of everyone's mind.

"Working with Hussmann on these cases from the beginning, and now addressing these new concerns with COVID-19, helps to give us the confidence that we can accomplish everything we need to do to make our customers safe," Preston said.

## Full-steam ahead

As the company works to address changing needs in response to COVID-19, they are also continuing their expansion project having seen such success, including 40 percent growth, over the last four years. Rouses Markets has two stores under construction in 2020, one in Lake Charles and a new retail concept on Freret Street in New Orleans.

This new location is a small-store concept where they expect to provide all the products and services of their 44,000-square-foot prototype store in a 15,000-square-foot location while also offering a restaurant, bar and significant outdoor seating. When it came time to design this concept, and make it a reality, the company went back to Hussmann with a new challenge.

"We took our cases and shrunk them down to make them work through different applications so they could be multi-faceted," Preston said. "We needed to make sure we could offer all we normally would and still make it fit in a small little box."

As they continue to expand and innovate their offerings – apart from offering everything from their standard stores, the Freret Street location will also debut new offerings – the company plans to continue having a close collaborator in Hussmann.

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From design and installation to service and maintenance, they've just been great.

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**Jim Preston**

Director of Construction at Rouses Markets

For more information about Hussmann, please visit [hussmann.com](https://hussmann.com)