

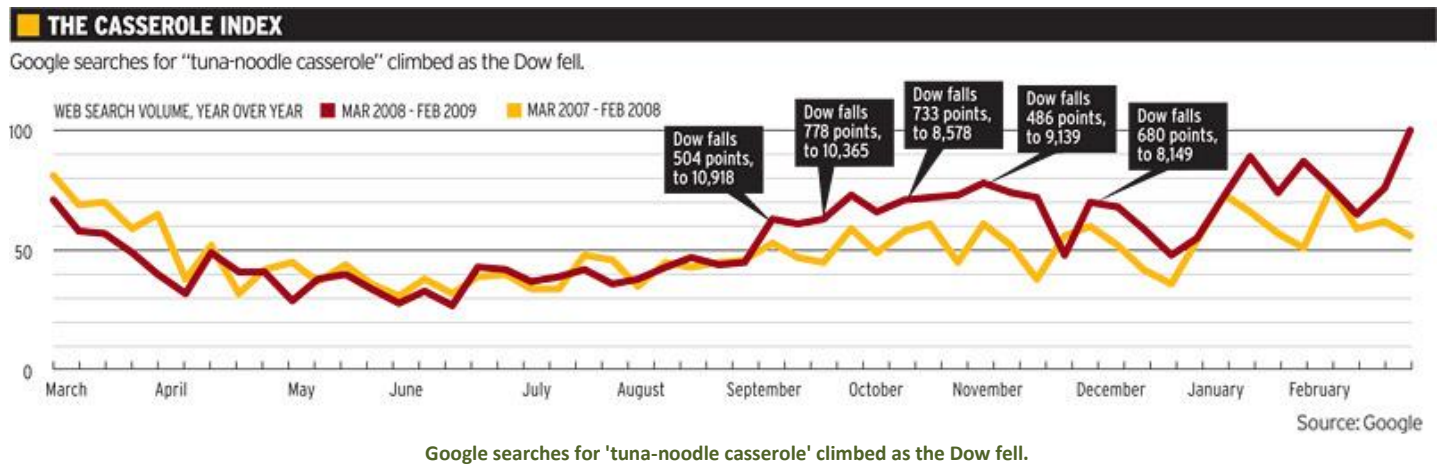
# Casseroles Make Comeback as Easy, Quick Meals for the Cash-Strapped

## Campbell, Kraft Is Helping Nudge the One-Dish Wonder's Appeal With Consumers

By Emily Bryson York

CHICAGO (AdAge.com) -- Guess what's making a comeback: that ultimate comfort food, the casserole.

The one-dish wonder has become a lot more popular lately among cash-strapped and often culinarily challenged consumers anxious to save bucks while getting dinner on the table. Casseroles never went away but were mostly a staple of the June Cleaver era and recently largely relegated to potluck suppers or gifts for grieving neighbors.



But the casserole is resurgent. Not only is it cheap and easy to prepare, it's made from ingredients that are probably in your pantry right now.

Robin Ross, group manager-cheese, Kraft Kitchens, said consumers in a recent study said they prepare casseroles between three and five times a week. "That was surprising even to me," she said. Campbell reports that seven of the 10 most popular recipes on its cooking website are casseroles.

Casserole-crazy consumers are being nudged along by the likes of Campbell and Kraft Food. John Faulker, director-brand communications for Campbell, said although the company has offered a variety of stove-top recipes over the years, consumers always seem more interested in casseroles. "Finally we said, 'Why not just fish where the fish are?'" he said. The company just launched a TV blitz for the cooking site, featuring recipes using its condensed soups. It has also taken more marketing online, and seen monthly web traffic grow about 50% each month in the past six months.

### Moving more soup

Campbell reported strong condensed-soup sales growth last year, but grocers are reducing the inventory they keep on hand, and sales dropped off in the most recent quarter. That put the company under pressure to find ways to move more of its core product, and casseroles are an easy sell.

Kraft's killer casserole ingredient, meanwhile, is Velveeta. The orange loaf has gotten considerable marketing support of late, positioned as "half the price of natural cheese." During the company's fourth-quarter earnings call, CEO Irene Rosenfeld said increased marketing of Velveeta and Kraft Singles has helped lift the company's overall cheese business.



**Not your mama's tuna noodle:  
Classic recipes have been revamped;  
in this case, chicken is the tuna.**

As part of the Velveeta push, Kraft recently invited five food bloggers to participate in a casserole-recipe challenge: a one-dish meal for four, with leftovers for the next day, for less than \$10. The winning recipe -- shrimp stroganoff casserole -- was from Lori Falcon, author of My Wooden Spoon.

"I have noticed an increasing trend in casseroles, because you tend to feed a lot of people, and you can make a casserole with whatever you have around," Ms. Falcon said.

Casseroles have come a long way -- more than three-quarters of a century. Jane Freiman, group manager-kitchens at Campbell Soup, said casseroles began proliferating in the 1930s, thanks to "Joy of Cooking." The first edition, in 1931, contained the original casserole, tuna noodle. By the 1958 edition, there were 58 varieties of casserole.

But the casserole has evolved over the years. So-called "modern casseroles" include more spice and fresh vegetables. Kraft's Ms. Ross said her grandmother's classic tuna noodle casserole included canned tuna, canned mushrooms, Velveeta, canned soup and elbow noodles. Her version is made with chicken, Velveeta, fresh vegetables, herbs, crushed crackers and bow-tie pasta or orzo.