

Convenience Store News

FEBRUARY 2013 » VOLUME EIGHT » NUMBER ONE

FOR THE Single Store Owner

Stagnito
MEDIA

Paying It Forward

Born into the business, c-store owner Terry Lambert now shares his tips and resources to help fellow operators grow their profits.

**Highs & Lows in 2013
Industry Forecast Study**

**How to Pick From the
Latest Foodservice Equipment**

**Big Ideas From
the C-store Chains**

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* Source: Altria Company reports: ALCS MICR estimates: versus prior-year period.
** Source: ALCS Retail Experience of the Adult Tobacco Consumer Study: Quantitative, October 2011
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From the Editor



More Granular, More Critical, More Distinctive

We're adding new departments to better serve the unique needs of single-store owners

This year, *Convenience Store News for the Single Store Owner* enters its eighth year of publication. The success of this still-young media brand has proven our initial strategy to be right on target: Single-store operators have different challenges and informational needs than their brethren who work for convenience store chains.

Over the past couple of years, we've introduced several new enhancements. In 2011, we organized the industry's first and only Single Store Owner Editorial Advisory Board. This group of single-store operators, representing various parts of the country, provides us with feedback on what we should be covering to meet the unique needs of the independent convenience store retailer.

Last year, recognizing the increasing importance of foodservice to the sales and profit growth of c-store retailers, we amped up our foodservice coverage in both quantity and quality. We are now in the second year of our "How To Do World-Class Foodservice" series, which delivers monthly how-to reports designed to help single stores optimize their investment and success in the foodservice category.



DON LONGO
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This year, we are following up that investment by introducing three more editorially driven initiatives. These new departments amply illustrate the granular, tactical approach that distinguishes *CSNews for the Single Store Owner* from all other media outlets.

- **"Big Ideas"** — Your store may have little in common with one of your big chain competitors, but we bet there are some good ideas you can glean from the best practices of the big guys. In this new department, *CSNews for the Single Store Owner* provides several examples of tactics being used successfully by some of the major convenience store chains that you can employ to improve your business (see page 58).

- **"Legislative Roundup"** — We know federal issues, such as tax policy and Food and Drug Administration tobacco and food regulation, are critically important to your business. However, in many cases, it's the state and local legislative and regulatory actions that hurt you the most. In this department, we highlight the major federal, state and local initiatives that could cause you agita in the coming months (see page 8).

- **"The Hub"** — Few retail channels are as dependent on the wholesale distribution community as single-store owners, and vice versa. In this department, we provide news, analysis, trends and research to help convenience distributors improve their working relationship with one-store operators and deliver better results for both sides (see page 10).

As the only publication focused exclusively on the industry's single stores, *CSNews for the Single Store Owner* will continue to be your best resource of news, analysis and research.

COVER STORY » PAGE **14** **Paying It Forward**

Born into the business, c-store owner Terry Lambert now shares his tips and resources to help fellow operators grow their profits.



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Tobacco Industry Takes Las Vegas

Many first-time exhibitors showcased their products at Tobacco Plus Expo 2013

By Melissa Kress

Tobacco retailers and suppliers from around the country escaped the mid-winter blues with a trip to Las Vegas at the end of January for Tobacco Plus Expo International 2013.

This year's show drew attendees from all walks of the tobacco industry, including approximately 270 exhibitors — 80 of which were exhibiting at the show for the first time. The 2013 exhibitor roster outnumbered last year's lineup, which totaled roughly 225 exhibitors.

The number of exhibitors was not the only difference seen this year; the mixture of exhibitors changed as well. Last year's show featured many exhibits by roll-your-own (RYO) companies, with attendees crowding booths for RYO machine demos. This year's expo, however, drew considerably less — perhaps a direct result of changes in the way retailers with RYO machines are taxed. Those changes were included in the mid-2012 Federal Transportation Bill.

Ed O'Connor, publisher of *Tobacco Outlet Business International*, said during the show's keynote session, entitled "How Has the Tobacco Retail Business Evolved: Where Was It 15 Years Ago, Where Is It Today and Where Is It Going," that a recent survey of 28 tobacco retailers encompassing 434 retail establishments showed RYO is gone and not coming back.

Accounting for more real estate

this year were electronic cigarette companies, a testament to the products' growth in the channel. Once an almost exclusively online product, e-cigarettes are

tunity in electronic cigarettes, noting e-cigarette sales "are booming" and projected to reach \$1 billion in the United States this year. "We believe electronic cigarettes are a game changer for the industry," said Rodu, a professor of medicine at the James Graham Brown Cancer Center at the University of Louisville. "The transformation is now. The winners are the consumers, and the industry can be winners as well. Tobacco retailers should embrace and participate in the transformation."

This evolution taking place in the tobacco category is not lost on retailers. The survey cited by O'Connor also found that e-cigarettes currently account for only 2.8 percent of the tobacco product inventory, but the majority of respondents — 92 percent — forecast an increase in their e-cigarette inventory over the next 18 months. Some retailers said they are carrying up to four brands of e-cigarettes now and intend to add a fifth, according to O'Connor.

"If you are not dedicating the shelf space and do not have the commitment to grow [electronic cigarettes], you may want to take another look," he said.

Considering all of this buzz, it's no surprise that e-cigarettes also dominated the new product showcase at TPE 2013. New players in the field include Logic Technologies' Logic Power Series, Encore Raw, CIGR8, ESmoke USA and XEO Magnetic e-Cigarettes. ■



now demanding space in convenience stores — and getting it. In fact, industry insiders estimate that c-stores typically carry four or five e-cigarette brands. One leading tobacco analyst even predicts e-cigarette consumption will surpass that of traditional cigarettes in the next decade.

Dr. Brad Rodu, who also spoke at the keynote session, sees oppor-

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National

■ President Barack Obama signed into law legislation aimed at cracking down on alleged frivolous lawsuits regarding posted ATM fees. The measure eliminates the requirement that ATMs display duplicative signs disclosing their fees in an effort to reduce fraud and protect consumers. NACS, the Association for Convenience & Fuel Retailing, praised the move as “a significant victory for NACS members.”

■ Now that a federal appeals court has turned down the government’s request for an appeal, the graphic cigarette warning labels released by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in June 2011 could get a date with the U.S. Supreme Court. The appeals court denied the government’s request that it reconsider an earlier decision blocking the requirement that tobacco companies place the graphic images and health warnings on cigarette packages. The appeal stemmed from its decision to uphold a lower court’s ruling that banned the warning labels based on First Amendment grounds.



■ Philip Morris USA, R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. and Lorillard Inc. have settled a dispute with 17 states, Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico over payments required under a 1998 anti-smoking agreement. The deal resolves the long-standing dispute related to the Non-Participating Manufacturer adjustments of the Master Settlement Agreement, and allows additional states to join under certain conditions.

■ The FDA’s Center for Tobacco Products added another tool to report tobacco violations. The new Potential Tobacco Product Violations Reporting Form provides the public and other stakeholders with another option for reporting potential violations of the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, as well as related regulations.

■ Despite fears that debit swipe fee reform would have a negative impact on small banks, new rules for debit card transaction fees did not harm them at all, according to a report by the Federal Trade Commission. In fact, the agency found that small banks are charging more in debit card swipe fees than their competitors.



State by State

KANSAS

Kansas convenience and grocery stores may soon be able to sell wine, liquor and “full-strength” beer. State law currently allows only retail liquor stores to sell such products, while grocery and convenience stores can sell only “weak beer,” also known as cereal malt beverages. The state, however, is considering altering the law.

MARYLAND

Baltimore-based convenience store chain Royal Farms has reportedly cut employee hours to avoid providing medical insurance under The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, commonly referred to as Obamacare. According to media reports, the chain recently restricted the hours for most of its full- and part-time staff to fewer than 30 hours a week. Obamacare mandates that by 2014, companies with more than 50 workers must offer insurance to employees who work more than 30 hours a week.

MASSACHUSETTS

Chevron Corp. agreed to pay the state of Massachusetts \$1.7 million to settle allegations that the company received

payment from the state for hazardous waste cleanup at gas stations, while also receiving reimbursement from insurance companies. Chevron also paid \$1.8 million to the state of Utah to settle a dispute involving fraudulent collection of money for cleaning up leaking petroleum tanks.

RHODE ISLAND

A lawsuit brought forth by tobacco companies against the city of Providence, R.I., hit a dead end. A federal judge threw out the legal action, rejecting the argument that the city’s new rules violate the tobacco industry’s right to free speech. The suit sought a temporary restraining order and preliminary and permanent injunctions against the enforcement of two tobacco-related ordinances adopted by the Providence City Council. The first measure bans adult consumers from redeeming tobacco product coupons and prohibits its retailers from offering certain promotionally priced tobacco products. The second measure bans the sale of virtually all flavored cigars, smokeless tobacco and pipe tobacco products in the city. Both ordinances are scheduled to take effect March 1.



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Opportunities for Profit

AWMA's president offers tips for c-store wholesalers to effectively serve retailers and increase their bottom line

By Tammy Mastroberte

While convenience store owners face a number of challenges operating in today's highly competitive industry, the wholesalers that distribute products to these stores are facing many of the same issues. Competition is fierce as many distributors are chasing down the same business. Consolidation continues to change the landscape of the industry and gaining cooperation from manufacturers can be difficult at times.

"Challenges vary in different regions, but it's a very competitive environment, and I hear about that a lot from our members," said Scott Ramming, president and CEO of the American Wholesale Marketers Association (AWMA). "The economy is still not great, and many are getting over the hump of some of the new technologies out there as well."

To offset these challenges and others, Ramming highlighted three areas of opportunity for convenience distributors.

FOODSERVICE

Many convenience store operators — both single stores and chain retailers — are introducing foodservice into their locations, while others are still in the devel-

opment phase. This presents a lot of opportunity for distributors to step in, according to Ramming.

"Consumers want healthier foods, and this trend has been going on for a couple years," he said.

C-store owners are looking to offer more fresh foods, including produce. Smart distributors will figure out how to offer it, help retailers sell it and still comply with the new food safety regulations coming down the road, the AWMA chief said.

CATEGORY MANAGEMENT

It's important for both convenience retailers and distributors to know what is selling in the store vs. what is being stocked. Answers are needed to questions such as: Should a store cut back on SKUs not selling? What products are always out of stock?

AWMA has partnered with InfoRhythm, a retail data management and analysis services company, to help distributors see what products are selling and compare their sales with others in the industry. This, in turn, helps the retailers they service.

AWMA members report their sales each week. Then, through a portal, they can view their sales down to the regional and store levels. "This allows wholesal-



Scott Ramming

ers to access category management tools they might not have had before and [they] can offer more to their retail customers," Ramming explained.

SNACKS DELIVERY

AWMA's Warehouse-Delivered Snack Committee compared snack foods delivered by wholesalers to direct-store delivery (DSD). The research showed that in most cases, the snack foods coming through a distributor were more profitable.

Ramming encourages wholesalers to talk to retailers about their snack programs.

"There are items where DSD is the way to go, but on other items, the retailer should not be carrying DSD," he said. "We did a couple tests with retailers where we changed up their assortment based on research, and it drove their profits way up." ■

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Ranking based on the MSAi retail shipment data from January - April 2012



New Products

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Grab-and-Go Snack Cup Containers

● Tamper-resistant, grab-and-go snack cup containers are the newest addition to Inline Plastic Corp.'s Safe-T-Fresh packaging line. The 12-ounce cups lock in freshness and extend shelf life, according to the company. Available with either flat or dome lids, the new clamshell containers are designed to fit in most automobile cup holders and are ideal for convenience stores. The clear design allows for attractive product merchandising that highlights the quality of food, from fresh-cut fruits and vegetables to snack goods. In addition, a tamper-resistant locking mechanism and a patented, removable tear-strip hinge eliminate the need for shrink bands or wraparound labels. All Safe-T-Fresh containers are made from 100-percent recyclable PET.

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Nassau Candy Sweet Classics Au Natural

● Nassau Candy introduced its newest candy line, Sweet Classics Au Natural. True to its name, the certified gluten-free gummy candy is free of artificial flavoring or coloring, corn syrups and preservatives. The Au Natural line is manufactured in the United States by Sweet Candy Co. and is available for immediate delivery from Nassau Candy. Varieties include Citrus Slices, Squirmy Wormy Gourmet Sour Gummy Worms, Squishy Fishy, Gourmet Gummy Fish, and Nummy Bears Gourmet Gummy Bears. The candies are a good fit for consumers of all-natural products, the company noted.



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C-Start Car Wash Payment System

● This new car wash payment entry system was designed to simplify and automate the transaction process for car wash customers and site owners alike. C-Start's cashless unit accommodates convenience store and petroleum retailers who want to collect payment through credit card or wash codes, while implementing comprehensive customer loyalty and marketing programs. C-Start features an ergonomic 12-inch touchscreen display with wash and pricing options presented on



a single screen. Its marketing capabilities include customizable promotions, video advertisements, coupons and the availability of loyalty, prepaid, fleet and subscription accounts.

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Redesigned Optimo Cigarillos

● Swisher International redesigned the packaging for its Optimo Cigarillos brand. The new side-open pouch features an easy-tear notch that easily opens the foil package lengthwise as opposed to opening at the top or bottom. In addition, the foil pouch locks in freshness and is resealed simply by pressing along the package, according to the company. Optimo Peach, Sweet and Black Cigarillos are available in the new pouches nationwide.



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 SNICKERS® Brand Almond KS 2 Piece Item #221584
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 MILKY WAY® Brand Singles Item #255386
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 MILKY WAY® Brand Simply Caramel KS Item #262619
 MILKY WAY® Brand Simply Caramel Single Item #243038
 TWIX® Brand Peanut Butter Single Item #227894
 DOVE® Brand Milk Chocolate Singles Item #267369
 M&M'S® Brand Mint Single Item #270180
 M&M'S® Brand Almond KS Item #270394
 M&M'S® Brand Minis Mega Tube Item #272415
 DOVE® Brand Dark Chocolate Singles Item #267292
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Paying It Forward

Born into the business, c-store owner Terry Lambert now shares his tips and resources to help fellow operators grow their profits

By Tammy Mastroberte



As the co-owner and co-operator of two convenience stores and a jobbership in Illinois, Terry Lambert spends his days immersed in all things c-store related. In fact, he grew up in the business, since his father was a Standard Oil dealer and Lambert worked in the family-owned store when he was young. He even continued working weekends and summers while he attended college — and always believed he had a gift for merchandising.

After graduation, though, he found himself following a differ-

ent path. Starting in sales at a local radio station, Lambert became an on-air talent and eventually worked his way up to general manager. Five years later, however, the pull of the convenience store industry tugged him back when a local Amoco station became available in Romeoville, Ill., and presented him with a unique challenge.

“It was a fueling location with a 20-foot by 10-foot kiosk,” he told *Convenience Store News for the Single Store Owner*. “They said if I could get sales up to one million gallons per year, they would renovate it and put in a full-fledged c-store.”

When he started in 1987, the location was pulling in just 46,000 gallons per month. He moved in, dropped the price by 20 cents per gallon, changed the business to a 24-hour operation and the numbers started to rise. Suddenly, he was selling 72,000 gallons in the first month or so, and within four months, he hit 100,000 gallons per month.

In addition to gasoline, he offered cigarettes, candy bars and a mini Hostess rack from the small kiosk, with a slide-out drawer for customers and bulletproof glass.

“I utilized every space that could



Photos by Otto Rascon

be seen by the customer to professionally merchandise it, so when they walked up, they were surrounded by items they could purchase,” he noted. “Eventually, I was selling \$80,000 of merchandise out of that kiosk each month.”

Amoco came through with its promise to renovate and built a full-service store, allowing Lambert to add coffee, fountain, magazines and more. At that point, his gallons per month rose to 180,000 and he was making \$140,000 in c-store profits each month.

“I rented the property from Amoco, and was the owner and

operator of the c-store business,” he said. “You don’t see that anymore.”

Building off the success of that first store, Lambert and his brother Jim — his business partner since 1992 — expanded the operation. Together, they grew to six Amoco locations and one Marathon site, including the father’s store, which they purchased in 1993 and converted from a kiosk to a full convenience store with a car wash.

In the early 2000s, they decided to divest all but two stores (one being the father’s store). Lambert’s original Romeoville store was among those sold and

is now a Walgreens.

Today, under their company Lambert Enterprises, the brothers operate the remaining two stores, both located in Joliet, Ill. In addition, Lambert is one of four owners in a jobbership that supplies fuel to 45 Wisconsin and Illinois locations and operates two stores.

RUNNING THE STORE

Lambert is a hands-on owner in all four locations, but particularly in the two stores he owns with his brother in Joliet — one on Jefferson Street and the father’s original location on Broadway

Street, now in the family more than 56 years. The Jefferson Street store spans 2,800 square feet, while the Broadway Street location is 2,200 square feet.

While neither has enough space for a large foodservice offering, the stores still feature cases of sandwiches, fresh doughnuts, New England Coffee and a fountain program. One of his jobbership stores in South Elgin, Ill., measures 5,500 square feet and offers mini pizzas, hot dogs, a sandwich line and other grab-and-go items already prepared.

"If you're going to do food-service right in a gas station, it has to be separate with separate employees," Lambert said. "You



Lambert isn't afraid to use coupons to drive traffic. He's been known to offer a free cup of coffee or fountain drink with no purchase necessary.

don't want someone ringing up a pack of cigarettes and then going to make a sandwich."

The biggest profit centers for his Joliet stores are candy and snacks. The Broadway Street location also serves as a local grocery because

there is no other store for two miles in either direction. For this reason, he keeps bread, eggs and milk all priced low — only making about 10 cents a gallon on milk — in order to draw people in.

"I always try to offer special



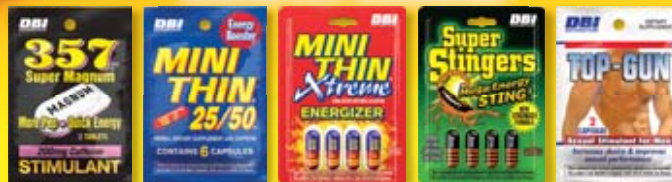
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Candy and snacks are the biggest profit centers for Lambert's two stores in Joliet, Ill.

pricing and I've never been afraid to do coupons," Lambert explained. "I'll offer a coupon for a free cup of coffee or a fountain drink with no purchase necessary. When they come in, taste the coffee and see how fresh it is, or try our fountain machine and see how friendly my employees are, they will come back. It doesn't cost me a lot, and people usually pick up something else while there or will tell a friend."

The Broadway Street store sells 250 cups of coffee a day at a 60-percent gross profit. Lambert also uses the car wash on site to draw customers in via promotions.

"We give a 20-cent discount on a gallon of gas when you buy a car wash," he said. "I put the price right on the gas sign to show gas with a car wash vs. without. I immediately saw a 10-percent lift in gasoline volume, and saw my car wash sales go from \$6,000 a month to \$9,500 a month."

After he factored out the gallons, he realized it only cost him seven-tenths of a percent. "It looks like the cheapest gas in town, which it is when you buy the car wash," Lambert said. "I saw a \$40,000 lift in car wash sales in one year of changing it."

SAVVY MERCHANDISING

One of the keys to having a successful convenience store — and something Lambert credits his success to — is proper merchandising. While he relies on his wholesaler to help with resets, he is always looking at the different sections of his stores to see how he can maximize the space and introduce new products.

"We always keep it fresh and new," he said. "We use proper category management procedures to make sure we are carrying the top 150 candies in our area, and if someone comes in and is looking for something we don't have, we make it a point to get it for them."

On the shelves, Lambert ensures the products are spaced right, everything is dusted and items are properly rotated. And he is always looking to try new things.

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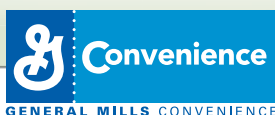
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“About a year and a half ago, we realized beef jerky was up overall in the c-store industry, so we took it from the center of the aisle and put it on an endcap to merchandise it,” he said. “Within 60 days, I saw a 20-percent increase in my beef jerky sales.”

In fact, whenever he resets the store, he sees an immediate sales lift because those people who come in

Tips for the Single-Store Owner

Convenience Store News for the Single Store Owner asked Terry Lambert how single-store operators, in particular, can improve their business, find new opportunities and more. Here's what he had to say.

What are some of the quick and easy things a single-store owner can do to improve their store immediately?

Lambert: Observe your store as if you are the customer. How is your curb appeal? Is your lot clean, and is land supplies well stocked? Look inside your store to see if the initial impression is favorable. Also, be sure to stock and straighten your products. Make sure shelves are clean and you are stocking a good mix of products that consumers want to buy.

It's also important to ensure your employees are neat, clean and friendly, and always in a uniform and name tag. Restrooms should be pristine, as clean restrooms can make your location a destination for many customers — especially women. Be sure you offer clean and fresh coffee, fountain and fast food areas, and use a branded coffee program with all the elements — signs, cups, etc.

Talk with your vendor partners to ensure you are doing whatever you can to maximize sales and profits with their products. Make smart choices and be aggressive. You need to understand that your vendors have to make money and be fair to them as well.

Where do the greatest opportunities lie for single-store owners?

Lambert: Joining a buying group like CBC and participating in the rebate programs offered is a great opportunity. CBC rebate checks average \$12,000 to \$15,000 per year per location. These rebates are usually available only to chains, but CBC members have the distinct opportunity to take advantage of these rebates and deals as well.

Also, maximize profits by utilizing proper category management. Owners can increase the bottom line by continuously looking at the competition and adapting.

regularly notice when you make changes, he said.

“When you mix things up, people will walk a little slower through the store, and they might see something new. [It] might not be new for us, just in a different spot,” Lambert added. “I always notice a 1- or 2-percent jump in sales [following a reset].”

Another best practice is to always have the shelves

Ensure gross profit margins are healthy while still being competitive, and stay on top of price increases and decreases — changing retail prices accordingly to keep a healthy gross profit margin intact.

In your opinion, where are most single-store owners missing the mark?

Lambert: I think it's in great customer service. One advantage of being a single-site operator is they can react to customer requests, comments and complaints immediately. In my stores, if a customer asks for a product we do not sell, we tell the customer we will have it the next time they stop in. Also, stay on top of new trends and product offerings. Reading trade publications like *Convenience Store News* and *Convenience Store News for the Single Store Owner* can help owners do this and more effectively manage their business.

What are the biggest challenges facing a single-store owner today?

Lambert: The biggest challenge is knowing when/if to invest in your business. Potential government regulations and tax requirements for 2013 and beyond are sketchy, and it's almost impossible to invest heavily in our business until we fully understand what the effect of the taxes and burdens of Obamacare and other federal regulations will be. Should we expand now and hope for the best? Or wait it out until we fully understand the effects of the health insurance mandate and other burdensome government regulations and taxes?

What are the biggest advantages a single-store owner has?

Lambert: Being a single-store operator, there is the advantage to react quickly and positively to customers and issues. They have the distinct opportunity to try new things, new products and implement new ideas without the constraints of being part of a big chain.

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stocked full. When the “chip companies” fill the racks, he always takes back stock so they can fill the shelves in between visits because his stores sell a large volume of snacks. If there are holes, the items get pulled forward so it always looks like the section is fully stocked. “Once we do this, the product will move,” he explained.

Lambert also recommends store owners walk through their location often to look at it from the customer’s viewpoint. Are the racks full? Is everything facing the way it should be? Most important, he said, is to change things up.

SHARING THE WEALTH

Back in 1997, Lambert was work-



Originally owned by his father, this store has been in the Lambert family for 56-plus years.

ing with six fellow dealers and jobbers, and discovered other stores selling products for less than his store could buy them. This prompted him to form a buying group in Chicago for Amoco dealers so they could have the advantages of bulk ordering the same way large chains did. Amoco found out and assigned one of its

employees to help.

In time, the group was returning more than \$1 million a year in rebates to 350 dealers through quarterly rebate checks. Eventually, the program went national under Amoco’s leadership using the name Red Crown Marketing. After BP purchased Amoco, the group became



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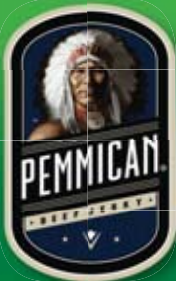
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independent and known as CBC. It started working with additional fuel brands.

"A few years back, we added training as a service and put together CDs with 30-minute computer-based training courses. Today, we have eight different courses," Lambert said. "We also put together half-day and full-day seminars."

Three years ago, CBC went online with a website, C Square, which offers a hub for c-store operators to interact and get advice from one another. Membership is free, and the site also offers monthly "Retail Tips" videos starring Lambert and filmed in his one of his stores.

In the videos, he offers advice



Curb appeal and proper merchandising are two areas of constant focus for Lambert.

on a number of topics from food-service and merchandising to restrooms and background checks. In one video, Lambert transforms himself into "Foodservice Man," who has "the power to quench thirst and vanquish hunger," to illustrate how c-store operators can be foodservice heroes to the

customers they serve.

Lambert is also an active participant on the C Square message boards, often sharing his personal tips for selling new products, promotions and more. Membership and participation in the boards is also free. To view his posts and videos, visit www.mycsquare.com. ■

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Coasting to a Soft Landing

C-stores will continue to outperform other retail channels as politicians avoid the “fiscal cliff”

By Don Longo & Melissa Kress

Politicians were still at an impasse over “fiscal cliff” budget negotiations when *Convenience Store News* conducted its 11th annual Industry Forecast Council meeting.

At the time of the event, in mid-December, President Barack Obama and House Speaker John Boehner were conducting private face-to-face meetings, leading *CSNews*’ consulting economist Maureen Maguire to say, “My gut feeling is that they will likely work out some kind of compromise on the taxes and spending issues” to avoid the so-called fiscal cliff, a series of automatic, deep spending cuts and tax increases on all

Americans that would have gone into effect last month if no agreement was reached.

Maguire was right, as last-minute budget negotiations between the White House and Congressional leadership resulted in the passage of a stop-gap bill to restore most of the tax cuts that lapsed on Jan. 1. The bill did increase tax rates on individual income earners over \$400,000 per year, and most Americans are seeing smaller paychecks now due to the expiration of the payroll tax reduction. However, the legislation postponed dealing with the automatic government spending cuts in military and domestic pro-

grams for two months, setting the stage for another dramatic fiscal cliff confrontation at the end of this month.

Maguire, president of economic consulting firm *ThinkResearch*, predicted that lawmakers would reach some kind of compromise if only to avoid blame for plunging the country into another recession. If no deal had been reached, scheduled tax increases and spending cuts equal to 4.25 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) would have gone into effect. That, according to Maguire and most other economists, would have sparked another recession in the first half of this year.

Regardless of the fiscal cliff problem, Maguire and *CSNews* Forecast Council members were in agreement that convenience stores are well-positioned to weather any economic downturn. C-stores outperformed other retail channels, particularly grocery stores, in key product categories throughout the previous recession. Despite growing competition from drug and dollar stores, the consensus was that c-stores will continue to win the cross-channel market share battles.

CSNews' 2013 Industry Forecast Study was presented during the Forecast Council meeting. This annual research report predicts unit volume and dollar sales for several key c-store product categories. Bright spots for 2013 will be energy drinks, other tobacco products, candy, salty and alternative snacks, and the ever-expanding electronic cigarettes segment.

MOTOR FUELS FORECAST

The fuel market will continue to have a significant impact on convenience store retailers this year. The average retail price per gallon of gasoline is forecasted to be \$3.47 in 2013. That represents a 29-cent-per-gallon drop from the average price of \$3.76 in 2012.

A steep decline like that will probably depress overall industry revenues this year.

Consumption will increase slightly to 180.5 billion gallons nationally (146.4 billion gallons at c-stores specifically). These slight increases will occur despite the better fuel efficiency of the U.S. auto fleet and the growth of alternative fuels, Maguire predicted.

TOBACCO FORECAST

Cigarettes saw positive movement in 2012 in the form of an estimated

2.1-percent uptick in total c-store volume. The tobacco mainstay, however, is predicted to swing back the other way in 2013, with a forecasted 0.4-percent decrease in c-store volume.

The other tobacco products (OTP) category remains consis-

tently strong. In fact, Maguire pointed out that the 3.6-percent increase forecasted for OTP industry dollar sales in 2013, the 2.4-percent increase forecasted for dollar sales per store and the 0.1-percent increase forecasted for unit volume per store are "on

FIG.1 Motor Fuels Forecast

	2011 Actual	2012 Forecast	2013 Forecast
Average retail price per gallon ¹	\$3.65	\$3.76*	\$3.47*
Gasoline (all grades)	\$3.58	\$3.69*	\$3.48
Diesel	\$3.84	\$3.97*	\$3.43*
National billions of gallons	181.7	179.7*	180.5*
C-store billions of gallons	147.4	145.7	146.4
National sales of gasoline (\$ billions)	\$663.9	\$677.2	\$626.6
C-store sales of gasoline (\$ billions)	\$538.5	\$549.2	\$508.2

¹ Weighted average price of all grades and diesel fuel

*Prediction from EIA/Department of Energy, Short-Term Outlook, December 2012

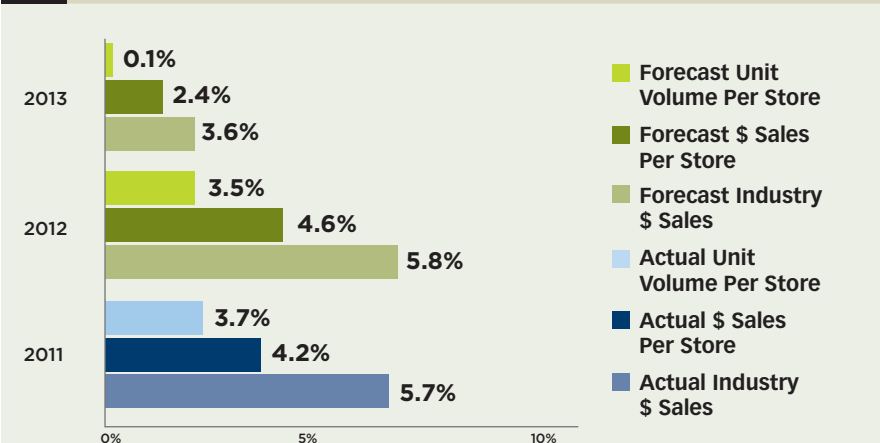
Source: EIA/Department of Energy, *Convenience Store News* Market Research, 2013

FIG.2 Cigarettes Forecast

	2011 Actual	2012 Forecast	2013 Forecast
Manufacturer list cost (\$/carton)	\$33.14	\$34.14	\$35.14
Taxes (federal, state, local) (\$/carton)	\$20.32	\$20.52	\$20.72
National volume, billions of cartons	1.23	1.25	1.24
C-store volume, billions of cartons	0.81	0.83	0.83

Source: *Convenience Store News* Market Research, 2013

FIG.3 Other Tobacco Products Forecast (% change)



Source: *Convenience Store News* Market Research, 2013

the conservative side.”

Meanwhile, the new kid on the block, electronic cigarettes, is posting spectacular numbers — although that growth is coming off a small base, noted *CSNews*’ consulting economist.

COLD VAULT FORECAST

No matter where you are standing at the convenience store’s cold vault — malt beverages or packaged beverages — the cooler doors tell a similar story. Both categories were estimated to post strong growth numbers in 2012, but are forecasted to see some pullback this year. Just how much pullback is where their stories differ.

Malt beverages ended last year with an estimated 3.5-percent volume increase per store and a 3.8-percent dollar sales increase per store. For 2013, the category is only forecasted to grow 0.5 percent in per-store volume and 1.4 percent in per-store dollar sales. Maguire, though, acknowledged that this outlook is conservative.

The packaged beverages category — which includes bottled water, carbonated soft drinks, sports and energy beverages — also was estimated to finish 2012 on a good note. This year, though, it’s expected that several segments will trend slower and lead the overall category to grow by only 1.3 percent in per-store volume and 1.7 percent in per-store dollar sales.

CANDY & SNACKS FORECAST

In the candy category, pricing and package size are having an impact on sales and volume in the convenience channel. Commodity prices have been rising — resulting in a higher sticker price — and several candy bars have been supersized, accounting for lower volume.

FIG.4 Electronic Cigarettes Forecast (% change)

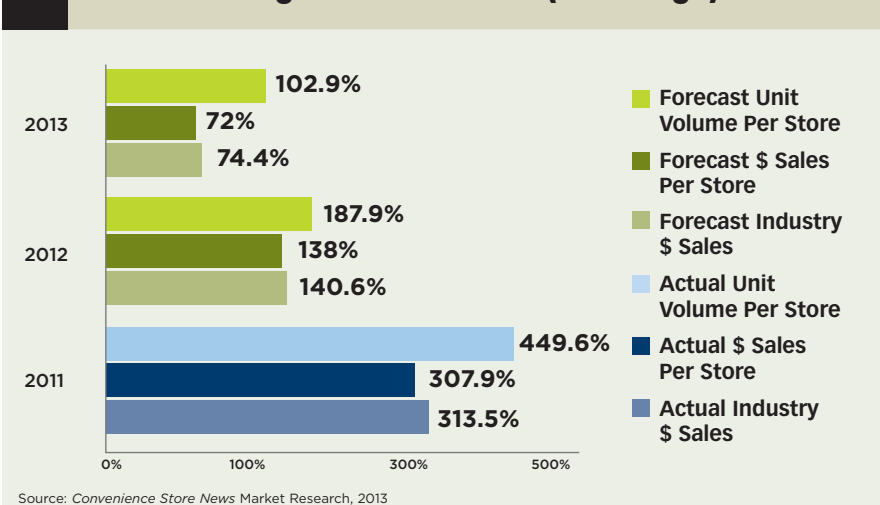


FIG.5 Beer/Malt Beverages Forecast (% change)

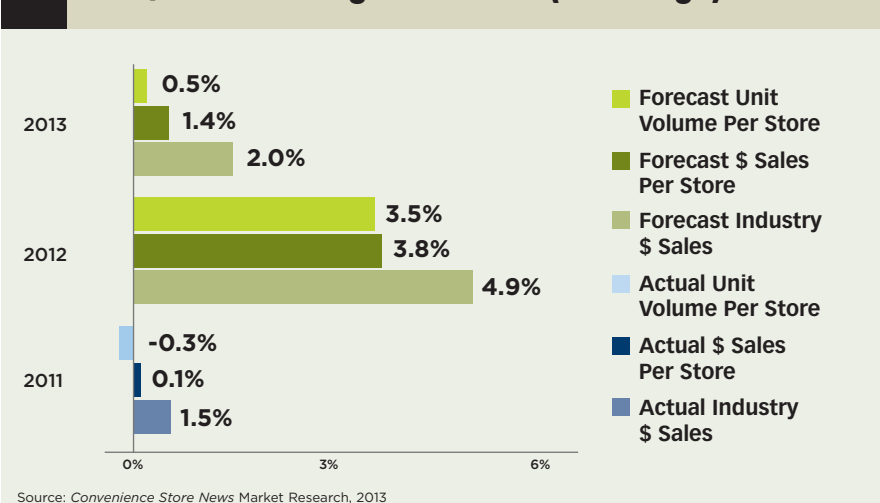
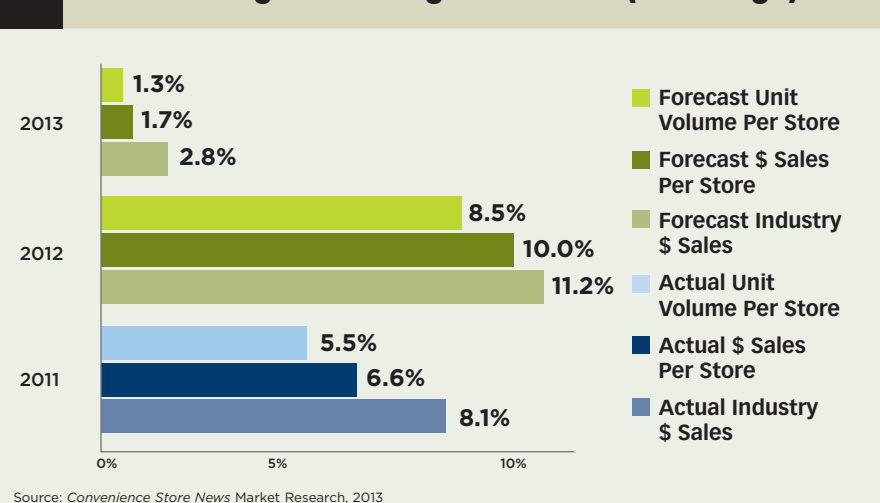


FIG.6 Total Packaged Beverages Forecast (% change)



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This storyline is expected to continue this year, with a 0.7-percent decrease in per-store volume and a 4.1-percent increase in per-store dollar sales forecasted for candy, gum and mints.

In the snacks category, health/energy bars are making a great case for more recognition in the convenience channel. While they are operating off a small base, the segment was estimated to post very strong numbers in 2012 and that momentum is forecasted to continue — albeit at a slightly slower pace —

throughout this year. Salty snacks also experienced good growth in 2012 and that's forecasted to continue into 2013 with only a slight pullback projected.

The 11th annual *Convenience Store News* Industry Forecast Council was sponsored by Logic Technologies, McLane Co. and S&D Coffee Inc. ■

EXTENDED REPORT

Go to www.csnews.com/catalog.html to purchase the complete *Convenience Store News* Industry Forecast Study.

The Year Ahead for Consumers

This year's *Convenience Store News* Industry Forecast Council event included a special presentation by James Russo, vice president of global consumer insights at Nielsen, on "The Year Ahead for Consumers and C-stores." Russo noted that consumer confidence continues to be challenged by economic factors such as the volatile housing, equity and labor markets, fuel costs and inflation.

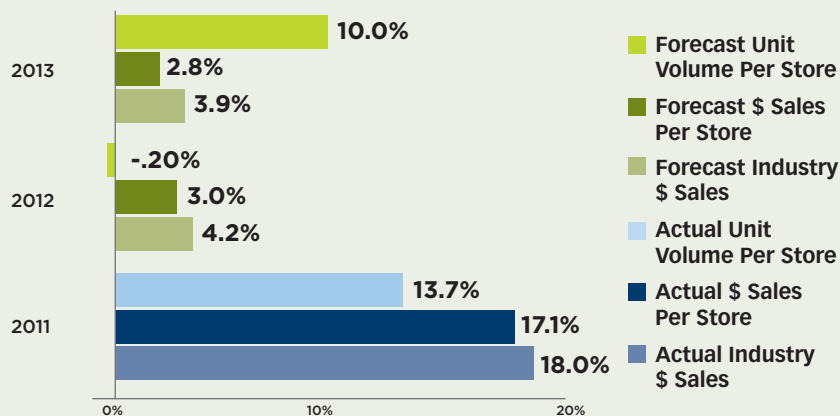
A big problem for retailers, according to Russo, is that median incomes continue to decline, leaving consumers with fewer disposable dollars to spend. On the positive side, fresh food is driving more and more shopping trips among consumers who are acting on this trend.

Regarding keys to growth, Russo said retailers need to understand that consumers in America have been polarized by income level. "One in two Americans own stock, but one in seven are also on food stamps," he explained. "One size doesn't fit all."

He also stressed that the multicultural opportunity is immense given the growing Hispanic-American, African-American and Asian-American populations.

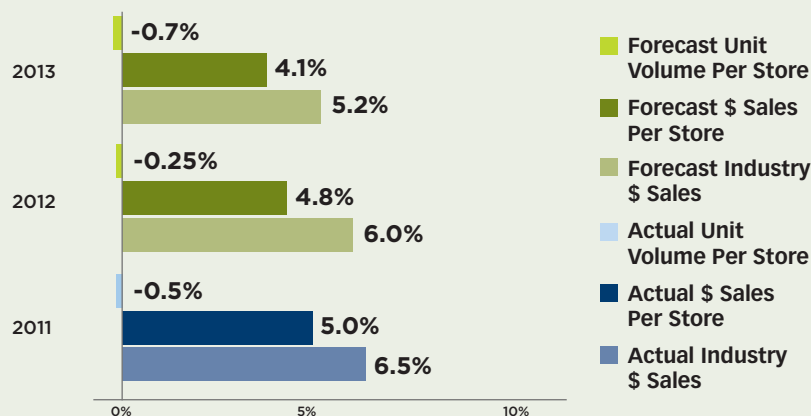
Russo agreed that year-to-year sales at convenience stores are outpacing other retail channels, with Nielsen figures supporting that trend. However, he pointed out that dollar stores have added 19 percent more units in the past year and present a new challenge to other formats, especially as they add more consumable products — even cigarettes and other tobacco products.

FIG.7 Energy Shots Forecast (% change)



Source: Convenience Store News Market Research, 2013

FIG.8 Total Candy, Gum & Mints Forecast (% change)



Source: Convenience Store News Market Research, 2013

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Andy Ernst,
CHS Petroleum Equipment Manager

Ask the Expert

Answers to questions that perplex single-store owners, brought to you by CHS, Inc.

ADVERTORIAL

EMV: What You Need to Know

What is EMV?

EMV stands for Europay, MasterCard and Visa, a joint effort between the three entities to create an international standard for the operation of smart card technology. Smart cards have an embedded micro-processor, or chip, that can hold more information than a magnetic stripe, allowing for multiple methods of authentication, and ultimately more security for both the consumer and the merchant.

Why were these standards developed?

Visa and MasterCard needed to address the escalating cases of fraud, which led the financial industry to develop EMV specifications for bank cards based on chip card technology. This is powered through an EMV-compliant credit card terminal. EMV technology is most commonly used in credit cards, however, devices such as key fobs and near field communication (NFC)-enabled mobile phones can all accommodate the same basic technologies. EMV via contact chip, contactless or NFC all use dynamic authentication for each transaction to reduce fraudsters' ability to use stolen credit card data. Chip technology also helps prevent cloning of cards, which is a common tactic used to exploit mag-stripe cards compromised with skimmers.

Who's using EMV?

The United States is one of the only industrialized countries in the world that hasn't fully embraced EMV payments. According to EMVCo.com, as of Q4 2011, excluding the United States, EMV cards accounted for 44.7 percent of total payment cards in circulation, and 76.4 percent of point-of-sale (POS) terminals installed globally accept EMV cards. The adoption of chip technology will help prepare the U.S. payment infrastructure for the arrival of NFC-based mobile payments to accept and process chip transactions that support either signature or PIN at the POS.

What are the EMV implementation deadlines in the U.S. and how do they affect me?

April 1, 2013: All acquirers are required to have the ability to accept EMV transactions.

Oct. 1, 2015: Inside counterfeit fraud liability shifts to merchants for all non-EMV transactions. You will need to update your PIN pad or similar device to defend against inside, non-EMV transaction counterfeit fraud being charged back to you.

Oct. 1, 2016: ATM operators will be responsible for fraudulent ATM withdrawals if their units do not support chip cards.

Oct. 1, 2017: Outside counterfeit fraud liability shifts to merchants for all non-EMV transactions. You will need to add a PTS- (PCI PIN Transaction Security) approved secure card EMV contactless reader at each of your pumps to prevent outside non-EMV transaction counterfeit fraud being charged back to you.

The counterfeit fraud that will shift to merchants in 2015 and 2017 is currently covered by the issuing banks. Companies such as CHS, which provides payment processing for the Cenex brand of convenience stores, will offer its merchants solutions such as replacing existing PIN pads on non-integrated, CHS-provided terminals with EMV capable devices. Now is the time to start discussions with your POS technician to understand your EMV needs and potential costs.

To learn more about what the Cenex brand can mean for your business, call 800-852-8186, ext. 8503, or visit cenex.com/businessopportunities.

Andy Ernst, CHS' petroleum equipment manager, has worked for CHS for eight years and is currently responsible for the Petroleum Equipment Department. Prior to his current role, Andy worked in CHS Payment Solutions as a product consultant, responsible for tracking changes in the credit card industry specific to convenience store business practices.

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The Latest Advancements in Foodservice Equipment

By Maureen Azzato

Ask any single-store operator for their favorite tried-and-true piece of foodservice equipment that never seems to “age out,” and the list would likely include the microwave, roller grill, pizza impinger/conveyor oven and possibly, the convection oven, too. But as convenience store foodservice evolves to satisfy a more discerning food customer, more modern and advanced equipment will be needed to supplement the tried and true.

There is a good amount of new foodservice equipment technology on the market today, but it's impor-

tant not to get distracted by the bells and whistles. Remember the fundamentals of your foodservice strategy and plan, and be sure your menu comes first and drives your equipment needs, not vice versa.

As you explore new menu expansion opportunities, it's important to know what works and what other operators, consultants and suppliers are impressed with in terms of new equipment and technologies. Our How To Crew experts agree that new equipment that accelerates cooking time, expands food holding time, improves food quality and presentation, and is easy to

Our How To Crew



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Nice N Easy Grocery
Shoppes



Dean Dirks,
b2b Solutions



Eric Giandelone,
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Burke Hodge,
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operate and maintain is deserving of attention.

THE NEED FOR SPEED

While safety, ease of use and energy efficiency are among the top equipment concerns for retailers, speed continues to be the cornerstone of the convenience store offering. Speed-cooking technology is not brand new to the market, but it continues to receive accolades from convenience store operators as its applications expand.

TurboChef was one of the first to market, but there are about a half-dozen companies that sell these types of ovens. Rapid-cook oven solutions range in size, complexity and price from \$5,000 to more than \$12,000. By blending microwave and convection oven technologies, rapid-cook ovens not only cook food quickly, but also make food crispy, enabling conve-

nience store operators to explore and roll out a wide range of hot food options.

Without question, rapid-cook ovens are the impetus for the large number of hot food programs that have rolled out in c-stores over the past five years, and why hard-to-execute menu items — such as pizza, custom-made toasted sandwiches, chicken wings, chicken tenders and a wide variety of restaurant-style appetizer foods — make it in c-stores.

In two minutes, these ovens can take frozen, pre-cooked products and have them ready to eat. Because they can quickly cook food in small batches, operators can better control food waste and make food more aligned to customer demand times. Another benefit is the rapid-cook oven's small footprint, with countertop models being only slightly larger than a microwave oven.

One How To Crew member, however, offers a word of cau-

tion. “Unfortunately, the service and maintenance of these items does not always keep pace with the features. Keep it simple, test like mad and avoid being anyone’s beta test,” this expert advised.

A new piece of equipment called the Ovention Matchbox Oven was introduced at last year’s NACS Show and developed by the original founder and inventor of the TurboChef rapid-cook oven. “Finally, a rapid-cook technology oven that attains the rapid cook without using microwaves, which has been a drawback since TurboChef first introduced its oven,” said Larry Miller of Miller Management & Consulting Services Inc., a member of our How To



The Ovention Matchbox Oven (top) is a new piece of equipment developed by the original inventor of the TurboChef.

Crew. “Microwaves are very damaging to most bread and they do a lot of damage to other types of food products as well. This oven is designed to do everything you can do with a chain-driven conveyor oven, however it dramatically

FOODSERVICE 101: CALL TO ACTION

- 🔥 Find equipment that is easy to use, reliable and durable.
- 🔥 Be sure you have a good equipment maintenance plan in place.
- 🔥 Never go the cheapest route or buy off brands that you have never heard of. The money you save up front will cost you a lot more in the end.

Convenience Store News for the Single Store Owner's How To Do World-Class Foodservice report is researched and written by Maureen Azzato, a freelance content developer and editor with more than 20 years of business publishing experience, with a primary focus on foodservice and retailing. Previously, she was the founding publisher and editorial director of *On-the-Go Foodservice*, a publication for cross-channel retail foodservice executives, and publisher and editorial director of *Convenience Store News*, where she worked for 17 years.

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Profit Tips for C-Store Owners



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Coca-Cola's Freestyle touchscreen fountain machine is being tested by several c-store chains.


improves energy efficiencies, cooking time and food quality.”


That brings us to another topic high on operators' minds — energy efficiency. As equipment becomes more complex and automated, operators want to be sure the equipment does not cost an arm and a

leg to operate. Technology is great, but the more advanced a piece of equipment gets, the more expensive it also can be to fix. “Equipment that lasts and doesn't break down often is more valuable than the most advanced technological equipment,” one retail expert said.

FOODSERVICE 201: CALL TO ACTION

 As a store operator becomes more advanced, so does the equipment. It's important to always consider the end user. Will the team using the equipment have the skills necessary to properly use it and maintain it?

 Look for equipment that can make your job easier, especially as you are expanding the menu.

 Think of each aspect of your store and how the equipment helps you produce a product. It's more about operational speed at this level.

NEW IN THE BEVERAGE WORLD

Turning heads in dispensed beverages is The Coca-Cola Co.'s relatively new Freestyle touchscreen fountain machine, which features more than 100 different flavor varieties. The machine allows users to select from mixtures of flavors of Coca-Cola branded products, which are then individually dispensed.

Experts agree the equipment is novel and innovative, and also reduces the amount of space operators need inside their stores for fountain beverages. However, one drawback is that only one customer can use the machine at a time. The customer learning curve on how to use the machine is also a drawback, retailers noted.

Despite some of the drawbacks,

one retail expert said: “The Freestyle Coke machine is unbelievable. To be able to dispense more than 100 flavors of fountain and eventually do away with liquid syrup is going to revolutionize the fountain business in the next 10 years.”

When it comes to the milkshake and smoothie category, the f'real blender receives accolades not only for the product it delivers, but also for its operational benefits. “It has a digital screen, which advertises to the consumer, and is fully automatic,” one expert said. “It automatically shuts down when it needs to be cleaned and will alert someone when it needs to be serviced.”

EQUIPMENT WISH LIST

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How To Do WORLD-CLASS FOODSERVICE

are seeing in foodservice equipment, many have wish lists of what they hope will come in the near future to solve some continuing foodservice dilemmas. For instance, they want

FOODSERVICE 301: CALL TO ACTION

 Consider the following questions: What's the return on investment on the equipment and will your business volume justify the cost? What's the life of the equipment?

 Find equipment that helps your store compete with the best, such as top quick-service restaurants and other c-stores.

equipment that is right-sized for the c-store segment. One expert said it is high time for micro versions of steamers, salamanders and cook chill units that are heavily used in restaurants, but still not properly sized for c-stores.

Of course, cost continues to be an issue as operators seek faster returns on investment in line with c-store volume. One operator said he would also like to see more equipment geared toward grab-and-go. "There are a lot of grab-and-go equipment pieces out there, but not a lot that make it easy and affordable for our trade of business," he explained. Others wish for improvements in hot holding times for fresh-made foods and hot wrapped products.



Many c-store operators would like to see new equipment that improves holding times for hot foods.

On the beverage front, one expert cited the need to improve frozen carbonated beverage machines, which are expensive and often prove to be poor investments, although the beverage products are terrific and popular with customers. ■

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Ten Swigs of Beer Trends

Refresh your strategy to capitalize on the latest category drivers

By Renée M. Covino

Is beer the cold vault beverage most near and dear to your customers' thirst buds — and to your beverage bottom line? Well, then it's time for single stores to maximize the section by leveraging the top 10 trends in the category, according to the latest industry reports and *Convenience Store News for the Single Store Owner* research.

1. Premium beer is still king of the cooler. Although sales numbers for premium beer have dipped slightly in the convenience channel the past few years, it is still well ahead (more than four times greater) than lower-priced beer alternatives in

sales per store, according to the 2012 *CSNews for the Single Store Owner* Industry Report.

2. A shift has taken place from mainstream lagers to specialty craft beers and microbrews. While they are still a small segment of the overall beer cat-

egory, craft beers and microbrews are seeing double-digit increases in sales. Industry analysts believe the explosion in the plethora of beverages available at retail stores — both alcoholic and non-alcoholic — has positively impacted the craft beer segment. Researcher Mintel characterized craft beers as less of a “get drunk” beer; they are meant to be savored, often with food, and appeal to higher-income consumers (\$75,000-plus households).

New products are said to drive this segment, with 67 percent of consumers saying they enjoy trying different seasonal craft beers, according to the latest Mintel research. While there are a handful of national players, many brands are regional. The steady introduction of niche formulas and unusual flavors allows retailers to innovate and differentiate.

3. Women are a rising target, particularly for craft beers. Beer is primarily a man's drink with 60 percent of men consuming it compared to 34 percent of women, according to Mintel. The research firm identified that this may be because advertisers have traditionally targeted men. However, in light of declining beer sales, that is starting to change. Beer marketers are now looking more closely at the female demographic, particularly with regard



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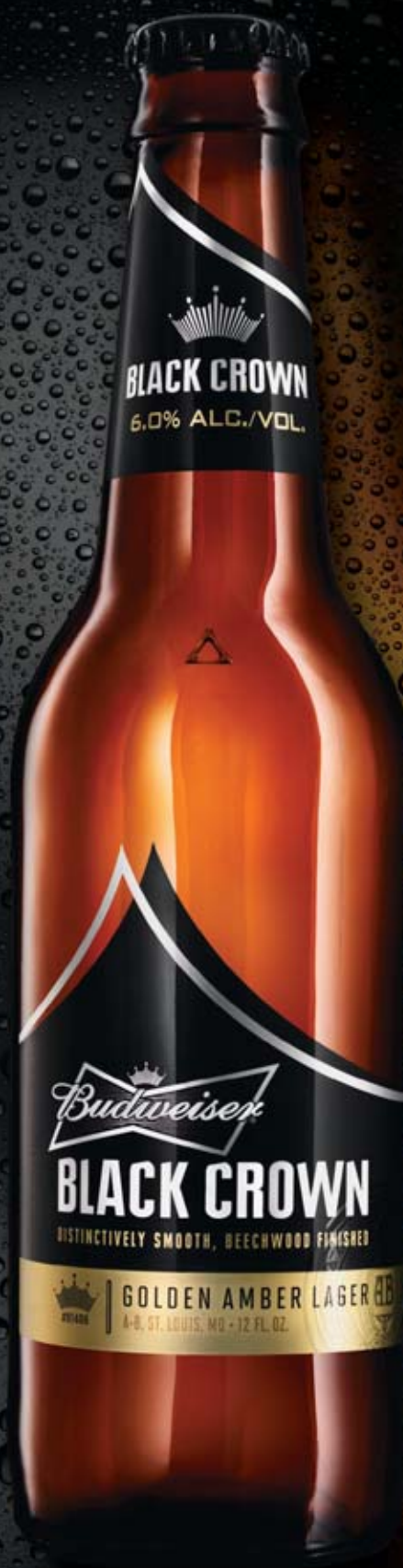
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to specialty brews and higher-priced craft beers.

4. The right mix is more important than ever. While a c-store's cold vault is still anchored by premium beer (experts say it should take up at least half of the space), there is more pressure in these tough economic times to round out the mix according to what customers want. Convenience stores are paying close attention to customers' brew requests and adjusting accordingly, offering a selection of popular and budget beers, as well as on-the-rise microbrews. A full door or more of singles is also recommended by some experts who cite that almost half of the beer traffic in c-stores is singles.

5. Hispanics trend high in imported beer. According to Mintel, Hispanics have the most affinity for imported beer (38 percent) and are the highest-volume consumers (6.6 drinks per month) in this segment. The research firm did not find this surprising, given that 70 percent of the U.S. Hispanic population is of Mexican origin and many Mexican beers are marketed in the United States. Hispanics' favorite imported beer brands are Corona, Tecate and Dos Equis, in that order.

6. Private label beer is on the rise. The poor economy and retailers' interest in attracting young adults has prompted some retail chains to launch private label beer. 7-Eleven Inc. and Kum & Go LC are doing so in the convenience sector, while Kroger Co. is emphasizing craft-style private labels in the grocery chan-

nel. Mintel reported that products like these could undercut sales of lower-priced brands.

7. Challenges that affect c-stores similarly affect beer. "From the standpoint of beer as a category, it is probably more analogous with convenience stores than other categories," according to Craig Purser, president and CEO of the National Beer Wholesalers Association (NBWA). He told *CSNews for the Single Store Owner* that underemployment and unemployment in the key legal drinking age demographic — 21- to 30-year-old males — negatively affects the industry, as does higher fuel prices.

8. There are good and bad regional beer pockets. While beer overall has experienced a downward trend for the past several years in just about every region of the country, there are pockets where it's been worse off than others. For example, in areas where the construction industry faltered — Florida, Texas and Arizona — beer consumption is down, according to Purser. On the other hand, the New England state of New Hampshire was called out this past summer as topping the nation in beer sales per capita.

According to data released by the Beer Institute, 43 gallons of beer were sold in New Hampshire in 2011 for every one person of legal drinking age. The nationwide average is 28.3 gallons. Other top states for beer sales are North Dakota and Montana.

Analysts caution that these statistics do not necessarily mean that residents in these states are

the heaviest drinkers out of the 50 states. Low taxes on beer are often an incentive for out-of-state residents to cross borders to stock up on their favorite brew.

9. Beer caves are a forward-thinking dimension for those with the room. Just like with higher-quality foodservice, more convenience stores are featuring deep, walk-in beer caves as a store attribute and shopping attraction. If a single store has the room, a beer cave can be a differentiating highlight.

Typical industry beer cave specs seem to hover around 12 feet wide by 10 feet deep by 8 feet tall, with room for at least five shoppers in the cave at one time. Beer caves allow c-stores to drive foot traffic to an otherwise low-traffic corner of the store; stock and sell bigger packages of cold beer; and offer more of the aforementioned microbrews and craft beers.

10. Can technology may bring innovation to six-pack sales. The technological improvements currently swirling around beverages overall mostly have to do with cans and could positively impact the future of six-pack sales. The use of self-chilling can technology is expected to increase category SKUs in c-stores where shelf and cold vault space is limited, Mintel reported.

To help drive beverage purchases this summer, PepsiCo teamed up with Chromatic Technologies to feature cans with specialized ink technology that changes color when the can is chilled to 46.4 degrees Fahrenheit. This limited feature was touted as elevating the consumer interaction potential with the beverage package, thereby building excitement and increasing sales. Stay tuned for innovation like this to hit the beer category. ■



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Single-Store Alumnus

By Angela Hanson

Meenu Sandhu, Chevron ExtraMile and Arco *ampm*

This two-store California operator is a firm believer in financial planning

After starting out as a part-time medical statistician and helping her husband in their convenience store business, Meenu Sandhu began to pursue her dream of opening her own c-store. She researched the business for five years before making the jump, purchasing a newly built Chevron ExtraMile franchise in Thousand Oaks, Calif. She later bought an Arco *ampm* franchise in Newbury Park, Calif.

Describe the first c-store you opened.

The first c-store I personally opened was with the Chevron ExtraMile store franchise. It is a 2,000-square-foot facility offering hot foods, sodas, ICEEs, coffee, newspapers and so much more.

What was the greatest opportunity you found in operating a single store?

Since I built the station from the ground up with my husband, the greatest opportunity was to establish from the beginning the floor plan, product placement and design of the circulation/flow of the store itself.

What was the greatest challenge you faced when operating a single store?

Establishing a business when the economy began to lag. When the recession hit, our projections were based on pre-recession numbers. It was a very tough ride. The property loans and financials were difficult to meet, but we were able to keep

afloat with hard work, great employees, marketing and sacrifices.

Why did you decide to open a second store?

We decided to build the second gas station from the ground up, also in the tough economic times of 2010-2011, to provide a name brand that was not available to our neighborhood. In Newbury Park, there was no Arco *ampm* within a 15-mile radius of our location, which brings a value brand of gasoline to our community at the lowest competitive price possible.

What's the most important lesson you learned going from a single store to a multi-store operation?

It is crucial to get financial projections that would work if the income is reduced by up to 20 percent. If planned right, multi-store operations allow for diversification in a lagging economy,

providing a financial cushion and constant income base.

What's been your best idea yet?

The best part of our endeavor has been to seek SBA (Small Business Administration) financing for both projects. Although there's stringent qualifications and criteria for SBA loans, we found it is the best financial product for new businesses with property.



Meenu Sandhu

What's been your worst mistake yet?

When we projected to build our new station, we set a cushion of 10 percent of the funds as extra. However, [that wasn't enough of a cushion because] so many unknowns surfaced such as environmental fees, requirements and upgrades, equipment upgrades, new equipment not in the original scope and contractor change orders.

What advice can you offer a single-store owner today who's considering expanding?

Expansion from single store to multi-store is successful with good financial planning, experience with all facets of the daily store operation, ability to recognize when change is needed in marketing skills and organized infrastructure for management. ■

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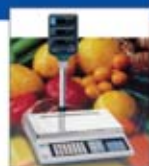
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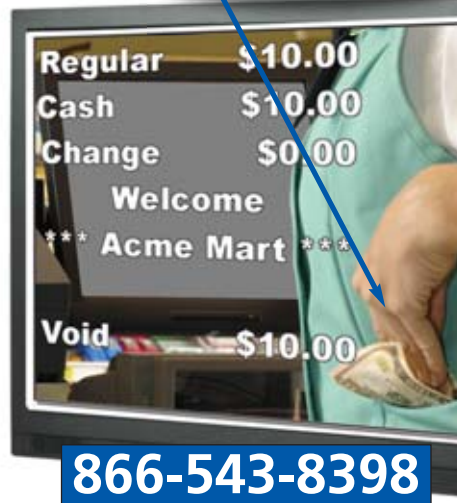
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BIG IDEAS

Best Practices of C-store Chain Retailers

💡Pride in Ownership

Private label products — long a mainstay in other retail channels such as grocery — have been appearing more often on convenience store shelves. Now, the private label trend has shifted to foodservice programs as more c-store retailers launch proprietary concepts.

GPM Investments, the Richmond, Va.-based operator of Fas Mart and Shore Stop convenience stores, is moving forward with several proprietary offerings. They include: a fountain beverage section branded Thirsty?; a coffee area branded Perfect Harvest Coffee Co.; and a still-unnamed fried chicken program that will round out the foodservice components of its stores.

GPM Investments is not alone. Also among the many other retailers dipping their toes into the proprietary pool is Atlanta-based RaceTrac Petroleum, which introduced a self-service yogurt offering called Swirl World in conjunction with the launch of its new RT6K prototype.

💡Uncorking Wine Sales

Wine has made its way out of the cellar and into the convenience store cold vault.

Olympic Oil Co. in Gainesville, Ga., turned to wine as a way to increase sales. Today, wine sales at five of its six wine-devoted stores account for well into the double-digits of overall alcohol sales, according to Hank Kaiser, chain supervisor and buyer for the 12-store chain.

There are several key points c-store retailers should follow to find success with this alcoholic beverage segment, Kaiser advised. Retailers need to stay price competitive; shoot for 20- to 25-percent margins; devote the proper amount of cooler space; and stock wines in a modest price range — to name just a few. He also stressed the importance of training store managers and employees on the ins and outs of wine, even if that training is informal.



💡Will That Be All?

While tobacco, lottery and candy are standard products found at the checkout, some c-store chains are taking advantage of a customer's time in line by changing up their front-end mix.

Whitehouse Station, N.J.-based Quick Chek Corp. is allotting checkout space in its stores to three fresh baked goods, including that month's featured bakery item, and soft pretzels.

Bamberg, S.C.-based E-Z Shop, on the other hand, is using location to its advantage. The retailer offers beach toys and beach umbrellas up front in its convenience stores in shore areas.

Taking a store's locale into account is a good best practice. For example, downtown c-stores tend to attract more female shoppers, so items like lip balm and cute key chains can prove to be winners. Roadside c-stores, however, draw more males in the construction and landscaping fields, so key items for them would be coffee and doughnuts in the morning.

💡Rewards Season

It doesn't take a psychology degree to recognize the benefits of rewarding good behavior. A loyalty program, whether strictly in-store focused or tied with fuel rewards, is a surefire way to build repeat business among core customers and strengthen brand recognition.

Recently, CITGO Petroleum Corp. launched Loyalty Bucks, a customizable loyalty program for its independent marketers. The company partnered with Centego, Outsite Loyalty Networks and FIS Loyalty to execute the program. In May, the company expanded Loyalty Bucks by partnering with The Pinnacle Corp. to add its Loyalink program to the offering. Approximately 5 percent of CITGO locations were participating in the loyalty solution as of this fall.

Shell Oil Co. has also made great strides with its loyalty program. Its Fuel Rewards Network (FRN), powered by Dallas-based Excentus, allows customers to save in two ways: through online mall purchases and dining out. With the addition of the Portland, Ore., market in December, Shell moved closer to its goal of bringing FRN to 200 U.S. markets by the end of 2012.



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