

A Memorable Finish

Editor's Note: This article is the fourth in an ongoing series by industry experts David Brewster and Maurice Minno on how c-store executives can better compete in today's economy.

I am not referring to Michael Phelps' eight gold-medal wins at the Beijing Olympics or the U.S. Men's Volleyball Team's Olympic gold medals. I am referring to my first bite into a perfect Granny Smith apple. The emotional connection this created by the crunchy, juicy burst of sweet and tart flavors and tastes fills my senses. My first bite was simply delicious, so I just kept going right to the core. This is the memorable finish in my memory forever—and the memorable finish your customers expect from your fresh-food offer.

In my 30-year career in the multiunit food-service, hospitality and convenience-store business, I have developed, launched and nurtured the success of fresh-food and specialty-coffee businesses. As is true in all of business, I have witnessed many successes. Also, there are initiatives that did not always result in a memorable finish. This was in spite of diligent master planning, extensive product R&D, intensive consumer research, inventive merchandising and detailed operational processes, all designed to assure a perfect experience for every customer, every day and at every store.

These less-than-memorable finishes are what I term the learning experiences. To me, they are invaluable. They spark constructive, soul-searching rethinking of strategy and tactics for refocusing on the right customer-centric criteria and result in truly extraordinary solution sets.

One such learning experience example came from my many years at Wawa as director of national brands and the senior marketing director responsible for strategy, mar-

keting and procurement. I championed a national-brand fresh-food strategy as one growth vehicle for Wawa's food-service business. The strategy was to partner with national branded QSR companies and install partner kiosks in Wawa stores. More than 100 Taco Bell and Pizza Hut kiosks were opened within Wawa stores.

Was it a memorable finish? The answer ultimately came from customers. Wawa customers were confused by these branded concepts and genuinely preferred Wawa proprietary-branded offers. This learning and the resulting regrouping of strategy and tactics led to Wawa's private-label products and expansion of Wawa's fresh-food brands.

From lessons like this one, I urge you to take action to reinvent your strategy, tactics and supporting business-process infrastructure as I have done from these experiences. I offer the following actions:

Fix: Dull layouts, merchandising and brand graphics failing to deliver customer-centric expectations for credibility with fresh foods and specialty beverages.

Change: Me-too hot and cold products that are not exciting for the purchasers. Offer a unique and compelling customer-targeted and expected "fresh" range and depth.

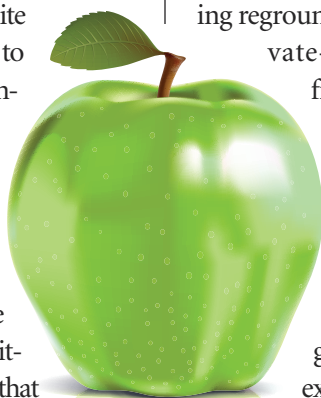
Fill: Business-killer gaps in vital fresh-food business-intelligence data, which empower profitable business growth.

Replace: Supply chains lacking end-to-end capability to deliver quality, fresh products with integrity and value.

Rethink: Annual fresh-food category plans incorporating business-underpinning detail in customer intelligence, business-positioning metrics, competitive benchmarking and cross-functional resource support commitments.

Study: Optimizing the right matching of fresh food and beverage offers with a location's fitness as an "A" food business location. Remain consumer-centric, paring fresh-food offers and formats with each site's unique demographics.

Reaching a "memorable finish" with your fresh-food business requires exceptional sustained commitment, diligent focus and flexibility to improve and adapt to an ever-changing business environment, all coupled with a long-term vision to be the best in the fresh-food business. ■



Maurice P. Minno is president of MPM Consulting Group (www.mpmgroup.net) and a founding partner of ISUS. Contact him at (760) 250-7791 or mpmgroup@aol.com.