

CONVENIENCE RETAILING

2005
convenience
conference



Creating a powerful brand
from the ground up

Author **Mark Stevens**
and former

JetBlue Airways Vice President

Amy Curtis-McIntyre headline the
2005

**Convenience Retailing
Conference**



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On a Monday morning in late January and early February of each year, the advertising experts on Madison Avenue, and members of the media who report on them, line up to determine the “winners” and “losers” of the previous day’s Super Bowl advertisements.

The newspapers and the morning talk shows are all abuzz about zany ads featuring monkeys performing human tasks and busty women mud wrestling over a beer, and within hours, the ads are deemed

“best” and “worst.”

At best, the entire concept is stupid, marketing expert and author Mark Stevens said during a kick-off presentation at the [CRC Conference](#), a two-part session dedicated to the subject of building a great brand.

Stevens, author of “[Your Marketing Sucks](#),” along with former [JetBlue](#)



“I could have called my book ‘Very Good Marketing,’ but who would have read it?”

- AUTHOR MARK STEVENS



Creating a terrific brand begins with creating a terrific product

By

Dan Blunk and John Callanan

[Airways](#) Vice President Amy Curtis-McIntyre, provided a no-holds-barred view of how businesses develop great brands – and the missteps many businesses take in trying to achieve greatness with their brands. Perhaps the single most important point both stressed was that a great brand is borne of a great product. Brilliant advertising does not make a great brand, however brilliant advertising can turn a great product into a great brand.

Substance over Style

In their shoot-from-the-hip style, both Stevens and Curtis-McIntyre took shots at the so-called “experts” who choose style over substance in their marketing efforts – and those who believe they can assess the success of an ad campaign the day after it first hits the airwaves, when the success or

failure of a marketing campaign should be based on what it was likely designed to achieve: sales.

“It’s a bad idea to spend a lot of money advertising in the ‘Stupid Bowl,’ because the ads are all about aesthetics,” Stevens said. “The day after the game, most companies haven’t sold anything.”

Instead of paying big dollars for an agency to dream up really funny or really sexy ads to get people’s attention, Stevens pointed to Wal-Mart’s ads. “Wal-Mart has terrible creative,” he said, “but it leads to sales and revenues.”

While Stevens noted the importance of capturing attention with catchy marketing (“Why do you think I called my book ‘Your Marketing Sucks,’” he said. “I could have called my book ‘Very Good Marketing,’ but who would have read it?”) he stressed the importance of staying on task. “Disney should be entertaining because that’s their business,” he said. “In marketing, we should be selling.”

Still, successful marketing is not about slick, funny ads, but about fusing a solid strategy with a fresh, creative message. Stevens said retailers should use IBM founder Thomas Watson’s personal test to determine whether a marketing idea will work. “Watson said, ‘Nothing happens unless a sale is made,’” Stevens said.

While he disdains expensive, high-concept advertising (“[Advertising] awards don’t move goods



“If you set out
to build a
great brand,
you
will fail”



- FORMER JETBLUE AIRWAYS VICE PRESIDENT
AMY CURTIS-McINTYRE

and services”), Stevens is fond of the infomercial. He encouraged retailers to watch infomercials, such as those by Ron Popeil, the father of the modern infomercial and inventor of such products as the [Pocket Fisherman](#). “Infomercials are not right for everybody, but they provide great lessons,” Stevens said. “Get an infomercial MBA.”

Involving your sales team in your marketing efforts can bring great results, but many companies fail miserably in this area. “Most firms don’t talk to sales,” he said. By getting salespeople involved in marketing, a company can avoid taking an approach that salespeople know will not work.

And once you find an approach that actually increases sales, stick with it. “Once you learn how to do it, don’t change it,” Stevens said. “Understand the power of what you do well.”

Product First

But before one can employ a successful marketing strategy, one must have a quality product to take to market. This was the challenge that faced

Curtis-McIntyre when she was hired to direct sales and marketing for JetBlue Airways in 1998. At the time, the company had no planes, no pilots, no flight attendants – not even a real office. For a marketer who firmly believed that a great product comes before a great marketing plan, Curtis-McIntyre and JetBlue were quite a ways from the Wall Street darling and a highly regarded member of the very exclusive club of successful airline start-ups that it is today. From its rather inauspicious beginning, JetBlue has confounded critics by posting a profit in every quarter since going public in April 2002.

While she can share many entertaining tales of how the company came to be the success story it is, including how its name and logo were developed – she drew it on a cocktail napkin at a bar only four days before a press conference was scheduled to announce the new company – Curtis-McIntyre said she and the other company founders were focused on developing a great product first, then building it into a great brand.

“If you set out to build a great brand, you will fail,” she said. “You need to create a great product, a great company. The great brand follows that.”

One key to JetBlue’s success, Curtis-McIntyre said – in addition to exploiting the extremely low expectations created by large national airlines – was the company’s use of cross-functional teams to develop the product.

“As we built the product, sales and marketing and the product development team were all one,” she said. That process was successful,

she added, because salespeople, who knew what they could sell, were able to have input on how the service was designed and marketed.

“We wanted to create a product that treats people with respect and that shows people we appreciate the money they give us,” she said.

Curtis-McIntyre told attendees that JetBlue spends an enormous amount of money training its employees. The company hires for attitude, figuring that it is much easier to train fun, energetic people to provide customers with what is now called the “JetBlue Experience” than it is to train employees to care about people.

Curtis-McIntyre said she believes many companies can learn from how JetBlue treats its employees. “There is no more important product in your stores than the person at the counter.” ■



▲ **Video: Stevens and Curtis-McIntyre**



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When You Can't Come Back

By John Callanan

FORMER PITCHER DAVE DRAVECKY
SHARES HIS STORY OF
WINNING AGAINST ALL ODDS

It was the Spring of 1988, and Dave Dravecky was living his life's dream. A former 21st-round draft choice of the Pittsburgh Pirates, the strapping young left-hander had pitched his way through the minor leagues, had been named minor league pitcher of the year and, in just his third season in the majors, had pitched in a World Series game. Now he was the opening day starter for the San Francisco Giants.

"I was riding high," Dravecky told Convenience Retailing Conference attendees in an inspirational presentation. "We played the Dodgers that day – Dave Drevecky vs. Fernando Valenzuela – and we won 5-1 in front of 55,000 people at Dodger Stadium. It was an amazing scene. But when I look at my baseball card from that year, I'm reminded of the words that came out of the mouth of the

doctor that September when he said 'Dave, you have cancer in your left arm,' and that, outside of a miracle, I would never pitch again."

What followed in the year ahead is looked upon as a miracle by many and has become one of the most emotion-laden stories in the history of sports.

Following surgery to remove the tumor and a portion of the muscle tissue in his left shoulder, and despite the overwhelming odds, on August 10, 1989, Dravecky returned to the pitcher's mound in Candlestick Park and pitched 8 innings to lead the Giants to victory amid a roaring standing ovation.

"I didn't really manage that game," said then-Giants Manager Roger Craig. "I just sat there in awe. He got

a standing ovation when he went over by the bullpen to warm up; he got a standing ovation when he took the mound and he got a standing ovation every time he walked off the mound. It was unbelievable."

But five days later, facing the Montreal Expos, Dravecky's life would change forever. Throwing what has been called by some "the pitch heard round the world," Dravecky reared back to fire a fastball to Tim Lincecum in the sixth inning and his left arm all but exploded. In a scene captured on national television, Dravecky crumbled to the turf, writhing in pain.

"I heard this incredible explosion in my left ear and my arm snapped in half," Dravecky recalled. "All of a sudden I knew there was something going on in my life that was so much bigger than baseball."

With the cancer again growing, Dravecky underwent additional surgery and chemotherapy treatments while facing the emotional reality of having to retire from the game he loved. Then, on June 18, 1989, doctors were forced to take a radi-

cal measure – they amputated his entire left arm and shoulder in order to save his life.

During his recovery, Dravecky says he learned numerous lessons about life and his relationship with his wife, Jan, who at the same time had struggled with clinical depression. "It's not about what's on the back of the baseball card," he said. "It's about people. The most important part of our lives is our relationships."

Since, Dave and Jan Dravecky have developed a website, www.dave-dravecky.org to support those suffering from either cancer or clinical depression. ■



▲ Video: Dave Dravecky



THE Main Discourse

BRAND TALK SPICES UP FOODSERVICE WORKSHOP

■ By Angel Abcede

Moving from incoherence to a concrete brand mantra helped drive-in fast feeder [Sonic Corp.](#) go from \$600 million in sales in 1992 to \$2.4 billion last year, according to Pat-tye Moore, former chief executive officer of the Oklahoma City-based company.

One of four speakers in an intensive learning lab on foodservice, Moore helped the roughly 25 petroleum retail and convenience store operators present to understand the importance of brand direction in the fast-food business.

Setting the stage for the discussion, moderator and co-presenter Brian Donoghue, manager of foodservice for [Town & Country Food Stores Inc.](#) in San Angelo, Texas, defined proprietary versus franchise alternatives, while emphasizing the importance of either engineering or signing with a well-defined brand.

Citing examples from her tenure at Sonic, Moore described how through extensive internal and customer research, they were able to clarify what their chain meant to customers and develop products and services to bolster a single message.

Much of their message revolved around what Moore described as “brand treasures,” or menu items and ways of doing business that were unique to the company. In the case of Sonic, its park-and-eat, car-hop format set the company apart as a unique alternative to the traditional fast-food drive-through. “Brand positioning is a filter for everything,” Moore said. “You have to understand what differentiates you from everyone else.”

“OUR ICE TEA WILL MAKE
YOUR TONGUE SLAP
YOUR BRAINS OUT”

-Mike Stack,
Quaker Steak and Lube



◀ Patty Moore,
former CEO of
Sonic Corp.

▼ *Below, right* - Kevin Curtis of Wilbur Curtis Co. ponders the comments of presenters during the foodservice Learning Lab



For Sonic, that understanding came from extensive interviews with customers, vendors, franchisees and store managers. One specific result from those interviews involved breakfast. Sonic customers said breakfast should be served all day long. So that's what the company did. Another example was card readers in every drive-in stall. Moore described it as a "fantastic convenience" for the time-pressed customer. A third example was indoor seating, which elicited thoughts of individual garage doors and phones on tables.

Whether or not a company implements the ideas, Moore said obtaining insights and feedback from customers and holding close to the customer's perception of the

brand is critical.

Overall, Moore said the c-store industry has a challenge in differentiating itself from competing c-store chains. In her mind, most c-stores fail to offer a "point of difference" and tend to look and feel the same. "Why would a customer choose you and not others?" For Milford, Conn.-based [Subway](#), that point of difference came almost accidentally. The company's current spokesperson, Jared Fogle, wrote the sandwich franchise saying he had lost weight by eating

Subway food, according to Don Fertman, director of development for Subway. A company public relations person picked up on the story and it eventually crystallized the idea of Subway being a healthy alternative.

Uniqueness of brand and how that idea breaks down to the specifics of menu selection and visual environment were issues that the final speaker, Mike Stack, director of [McAlister's Deli](#) in Ridgeland, Miss., and chairman of [Quaker Steak and Lube](#) in Sharon, Pa., addressed. He said one of his chains, McAlister's, is known for its sweet ice tea, and the other, for its chicken wings and automobile themes. "Our ice tea will make your tongue slap your brains out," he said. "Our chicken wings are so good, a bulldog would break its chain. Figure out what you're doing different, create that category and be the only one in it." ■

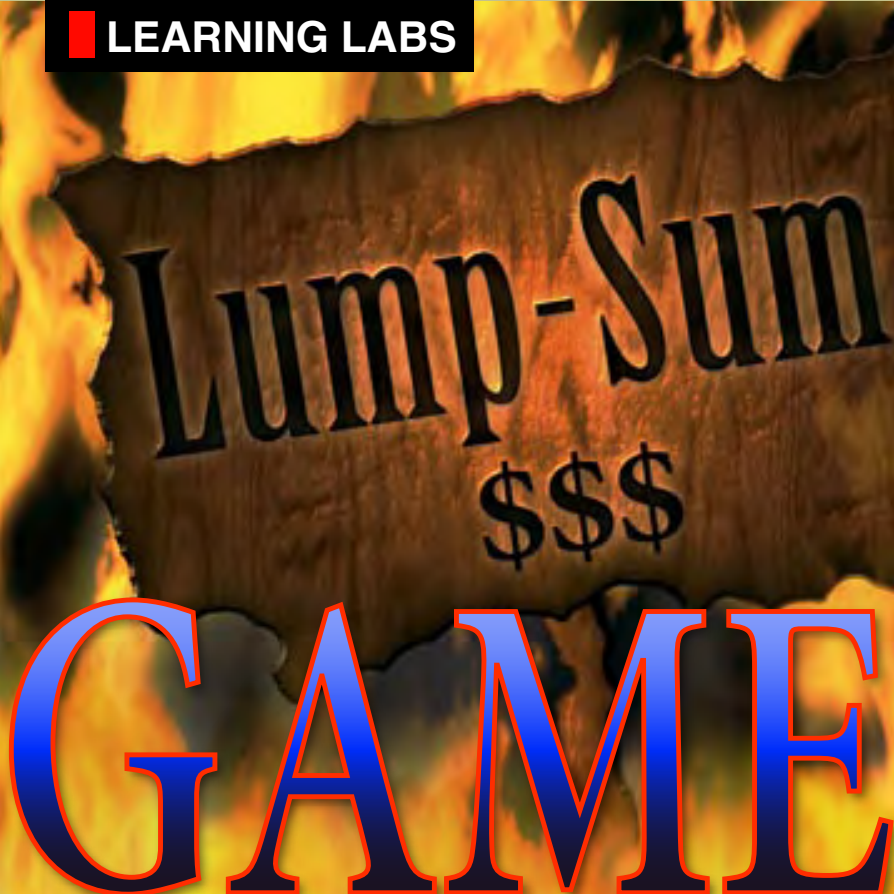


▲ **Advertisement: Curtis**

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2005



By Dan Blunk

RETAILERS URGED TO FOCUS ON INDIVIDUAL TOBACCO CATEGORIES

When it comes to the tobacco category today, there is still a tendency to lump all other tobacco products (OTP) together.

However, speakers at the Learning Lab session titled "Keeping the Tobacco Category on Top in Today's Marketplace," told retailers they do this at their peril. With explosive growth in areas such as cigars, smokeless tobacco and even make-your-own/roll-your-own cigarettes, the category is so complex that a one-size-fits-all approach no longer works.

Mary Szarmach, vice president of sales and marketing for Boulder, Colo.-based [Smoker Friendly](#),

pointed out that, "You have to pay attention to each of these segments."

It is rare today to hear upbeat news about the tobacco industry. Facing stiff opposition from well-funded and highly motivated anti-smoking groups, a growing number of smoking bans in cities large and small, and tough competition both within and outside the channel, it's understandable that many convenience retailers hang their head about tobacco.

Still, speakers noted that OTP has been the real story in tobacco lately, with a strong performance in 2004. Steve Towle, director of category development for [U.S. Smokeless Tobacco Co.](#), reported that, while cigarette sales have declined over the past 20 years, sales of moist smokeless tobacco (MST) have grown by 138% during that time.

Cigars is another sub-category that has stepped up, with flavors and singles accounting for much of its growth, said Steve Sandman, vice president of national accounts for [Altadis USA](#). "There's a lot of money to be made in the tobacco category outside of cigarettes," Sandman said.

Roll-your-own and make-your-own cigarettes (RYO/MYO) – while they currently account for a small slice of even the OTP segment – are seeing strong growth in light of high taxes and rising cigarette retail prices, said Ken Hagler, vice president of National Tobacco Co. This is espe-

STEVE TOWLE, USSTC'S DIRECTOR OF CATEGORY MANAGEMENT, DISCUSSES THE GROWTH IN THE MOIST SMOKELESS TOBACCO SEGMENT



cially good news because c-stores control a lion's share of the RYO/MYO business. Hagler presented data that showed that RYO/MYO sales are growing faster than sales of machine-made cigarettes.

Lou Maiellano, with [Sunoco Inc.](#), said he has had great success with products like RYO/MYO in his stores.

"The tobacco business has changed, but there are many retailers saying, 'It's over,'" he said. "That's just not true." ■



▲Advertisement: FKI

Food in Your Face



Pioneering Sheetz scores perfect recipe



By Jennifer Bulat

day, came from the work of 14 different groups comprising 140 people. They added the project on top of their existing full-time jobs, toiling toward a concept meant to put Sheetz as they knew it out of business.

"Every person in the corporate office had some hand in building this store," says Keith Boston, Sheetz's director of culinary development.

The company put so much time into dreaming up, researching and executing the store that very little has had to change since the \$7 million store opened last June ([CSP, July '04, p. 38](#)). However, there have been some surprises along the way, most of them positive:

* The Sheetz Bros. Coffeez concept has been extremely well-received, Boston says. The program — which for the first time used the Sheetz name to underscore the family aspect of the corporation — is meant to compete with high-end brands such as Starbucks.

* In something of a switch for Sheetz, the store offers pre-made sandwiches and salads. While this may clash with Sheetz's mantra of "made to order," Steve Sheetz says the items have accomplished their mission.

"There's just a certain segment of people who want something in a hurry, who

value speed over a made-to-order sandwich," he says.

Now this one-of-a-kind store, ironically, has a twin. A second convenience restaurant opened in Raleigh, N.C., in early March. The floor plan is a mirror of the Altoona location, and the menu is nearly the same, though it will offer made-to-order sandwiches at the pump.

Overall, the new concept has been everything the company envisioned. Whenever Steve Sheetz hits the road, he says, "everyone asks, 'When are we getting one?'"

Based on the way Sheetz operates, they might not have to wait too long. ■

Unless you've made a trip to Altoona, Pa., you've never seen a store like the [Sheetz](#) convenience restaurant. What other c-store offers homemade gelato, pizza and a made-to-order ham sandwich on a pretzel roll, all under one roof?

That's exactly the reaction that chairman Steve Sheetz and the rest of the company wanted when they created this 10,000-square-foot concept store. From the constantly changing digital menu boards and an overflowing salad bar to fresh-made pizzas and made-to-order toasted sub sandwiches, Sheetz's newborn convenience restaurant has redefined what it means to be in the foodservice business.

"Our idea was to put food in your face, and that's what we did," Sheetz says.

The convenience restaurant, whose creation spanned three years from concept to opening



Bill Reilly,
Sheetz Inc.

"Every person in the corporate office had some hand in building this store."

**- Keith Boston,
Sheetz Inc.**



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▲ Video: A tour of the Sheetz restaurant

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"We're a failure if we put 'Smoker Friendly' up on our signs and we don't have a friendly place."

- Terry Gallagher Jr.,
Smoker Friendly

Putting the "Friendly" in Smoker Friendly

**Colorado retailer profits
from giving product away**
By Dan Blunk

Customers who walk into stores owned by [Smoker Friendly](#), a Boulder, Colo.-based operator of 90 smoke shops in five western states, are often greeted not only by smiling employees, but also by free products to sample.

However, Smoker Friendly employees do not just toss free packs of cigarettes into a bin and let customers help themselves. The company's in-store sampling programs are highly targeted, cohesive efforts designed to increase customer retention and boost sales.

(Left to right) Mickey Falconburg,
Mary Szarmach and
Terry Gallagher Jr. of Smoker Friendly

Smoker Friendly focuses its programs on new products, such as flavored cigarettes and cigars, and tobacco items that are growing in popularity, including roll-your-own/make-your-own cigarettes. The idea is that customers are more likely to become regular purchasers of a new product if they get to sample it first.

When a new flavored cigarette or smokeless brand rolls into a store, employees look to customers for initial reviews. Yes, smoking and chewing are very much allowed at most company stores because minors are not permitted to enter the stores.

Keeping new products in front of customers is critical, so Smoker Friendly constantly shuffles its sampling programs. "We have found that with premium cigarettes, the more you sample, you'll get add-on," says Mary Szarmach, vice president of sales and marketing. "If a customer normally buys three packs of Marlbo-

ros, they might only buy two packs and buy two more packs of luxury cigarettes."

Dustin Wilson, manager of a Smoker Friendly store in Thornton, Colo., says he has seen the power of sampling. "If someone comes in saying how expensive their brand is and asks if we have anything that's close to their brand, I'll open up a pack and offer them one and light it for them," he says. "When they say, 'Whoa, what's that?' nine times out of 10, they'll buy what they're sampling."

President Terry Gallagher Jr. says Smoker Friendly has experienced double-digit growth in almost all its tobacco sub-categories over the past year, especially cigars, other tobacco products and general merchandise. He credits the training and sampling program for much of that success.

"In a lot of cases, we've taken the place of the local tobacconist," he says.

To strengthen relationships with customers, it is important to have people with an outgoing personality working

at the store level. "We want to give our clerks and managers every tool they can have to converse with customers," Szarmach says. "When they see what you're doing and you've gotten a conversation going, that's a huge part of the success of getting people into our stores."

Gallagher says friendly employees are a big part of Smoker Friendly's success: "We're a failure if we put the name 'Smoker Friendly' up on our signs and we don't have a friendly place." ■



▲ **Video: A look inside Smoker Friendly**



NEW TECHNOLOGY: turn flat sales and higher expenses into bigger profits.

Flat sales and higher expenses have become unfortunate facts of c-store life. Yet smart retailers are still finding ways to improve their bottom line. How can they increase profits when more dollars aren't coming into the store? By taking better care of the dollars that are.

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tag, but consider this: an expense is not really an expense at all when it makes you money. Clinging to old, non-integrated security technology is almost certainly costing you far more



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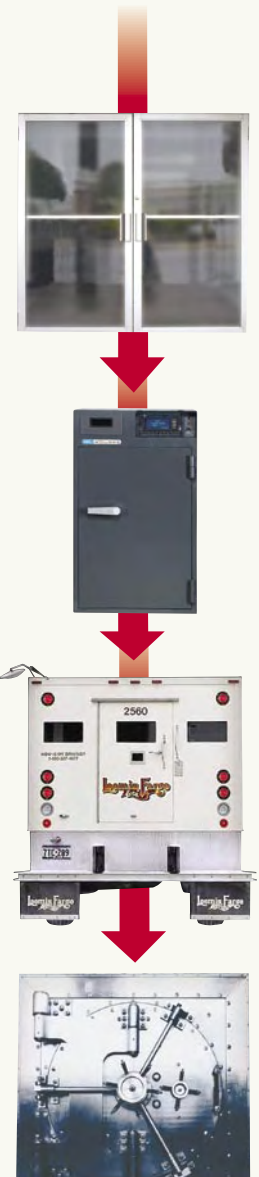
Validator, which counts up to 25 bills at once, go a long way to increase accuracy and decrease managerial back-room time.

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situation, get more customers and still make money. "Small operators don't have to throw up their hands and say [the big boxes] won."

Harvester General is a unique store in that the community around it is still developing. Those who live in the development receive a 10% discount on purchases at the store, but until the area is fully developed, however, commuters have become the store's primary customer base.

But the store's isolated location did not encourage heavy commuters to stop and higher prices were yet another obstacle. Charter created a Gas Club with the lure of free gasoline that now gives commuters a reason to stop for gas.

Gas Club members get free gasoline after nine visits. After nine visits, the amount of gallons purchased is averaged in an Excel spreadsheet. Whatever that average is, the customer receives that amount free on their next visit. The formula proves out to be cheaper for members after 10 purchases than if they had purchased the fuel at a competitor's outlet at a 15-cent lower posted price.

The club caught on quickly, with the local Des Moines newspaper even writing a story about the program.

There is no snazzy computer program and no long form to sign up. Just basic 3-ring binders in the store, with a sheet of paper that records each fill-up quantity. Only a first and last name is collected. The best part of the program is that customers have to enter the store each visit to sign off on

their gallon purchase. Not only do the majority end up making an additional purchase, but store associates quickly learn the names of Gas Club members.

Customers feel like they are getting something back while the store is able to compete with big-box retailers on price. With a goal of reaching 500 members, this small mom-and-pop store is proving that you don't have to be a large retailer to build your gasoline business. ■



Mark Charter,
Harvester General Store

General Manager Mark Charter wanted the BP-branded Harvester General Store to be able to compete on gasoline prices. The site rests in between Des Moines and Marshalltown, leaving it ripe for commuter business; but it could not match the aggressive pricing tactics of Big Box sites in Marshalltown.

Neither could other local small operators. "They all had to conform on pricing," said Charter, who set out to combat the

You don't have to be a large retailer to build your gasoline business.



▲ Video: Harvester General's Gas Club program

With a lineup of top-tier guest speakers, detail-rich educational learning labs and the opportunity to network and discuss the tools of the trade, Convenience Retailing Conference 2005 attendees got all they bargained for from a business perspective. But a little play time helps too, and the beautiful Arizona weather in February offered just the right mix of sun and breeze for a mountain hike or a round (or two) of golf.

Using the navigation buttons at right, you can browse through our virtual photo album of photos of the event and its attendees.

CRC *in pictures*



Photo 1 of 20

The 2005 Convenience Retailing Conference kicked off with cocktails and dinner in the mock c-store

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