



THE CONVENIENCE CHANNEL EMBRACES

A NEW ERA IN TOBACCO RETAILING

INSIDE

Going Forward

Convenience retailers are finding ways to maintain and even grow their cigarette sales

Teaming Up for Profitability

Suppliers add flexibility to their merchandising programs

Holy Smoke(less)

OTP shoppers are a hot commodity in the battle to build shopper frequency

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While few would argue the cigarette market as a whole is in decline, convenience retailers, perhaps due to their focus on the category, are finding ways to sustain sales growth.

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As retailers bear down to make the most of a challenged category, many say manufacturer cooperation is one reason tobacco products continue to show promise in the convenience channel.

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Product and packaging innovation are driving growth in the Other Tobacco Products (OTP) segment of late. For retailers, the challenge is in keeping up with new products and breaking out sales data.

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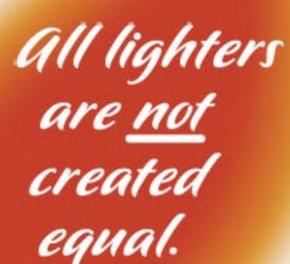


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hile the cigarette industry is under siege on several fronts – from health advocates to state legislators hoping to balance their budgets on the backs of smokers and cigarette companies – the category remains healthy, if not vibrant, in the convenience channel, and will likely remain that way, industry players say.

All of which may seem strange for a market perceived to be in a state of "permanent decline."

"The market's flat – no two ways about that," admits Mike Zielinski, president and CEO of Hillsdale, Ill-based Royal Buying Group. "On the one hand, there are more people today, but on the other hand, there are less of them smoking."

But as it specifically relates to the convenience channel, the cigarette market remains relatively robust.

"Most convenience retailers would say it is not [in decline]," says David Bishop, director of Willard Bishop
Consultants, Ltd. "If you speak with
the large convenience retailers such
as ExxonMobil, Valero and Hess, or
even the regional chains like Wawa or
Sheetz, these companies are reporting
category growth in an industry that's
declining. So obviously it goes to the
fact that they're emphasizing the business more aggressively to gain share
in their respective markets."

Others contend that the market isn't in such a precipitous decline – that the perception of such is based on inaccurate data.

"The decline isn't nearly as steep as you are led to believe," says Kent Raphael, vice president of merchandising for Indianapolis-based Village Pantry. "A lot of the information comes from a reporting agency the major tobacco companies subscribe to. But keep in mind that many of the smaller companies – a lot of the fourth-tier guys – are not reporting to this database."

It's common knowledge that the majors have been losing share to fourth-tier companies over the past decade, primarily based on price increases caused by MSA compliance. Raphael's contention, then, is that if the companies losing share are reporting their losses, and companies gaining share are not reporting their gains, the overall drop in the market is being significantly overstated.

"You've probably

heard that consumption is down several percent, but it's probably only about 1 percent a year now - not nearly as much as you think," he says. "And over the next five years, I don't know that there will be a dramatic change."

AVERAGE PRICE PER BRAND IN CONVENIENCE STORES

IN CONVENIENCE CTORES		
BRAND	CURRENT RETAIL PRICE	CURRENT BUY- DOWN PER PACK
Newport	\$4.02	\$0.75
Marlboro	\$3.62	\$0.58
Camel	\$3.58	\$0.83
Kool	\$3.55	\$0.84
Doral	\$3.13	\$0.89
Basic	\$3.11	\$0.61
USA Gold	\$2.87	\$0.10
Source: Citigroup Tobacco Trade Survey		

Bhavani Parameswar, vice president and CFO of King Maker Marketing Inc., agrees. King Maker is an established fourth-tier company that imports and distributes tobacco products – cigarettes and RYO tobacco – from India. Blended to suit the tastes of American consumers, King Maker's brands include Checkers, Hi-Val, Gold Crest, Ace and Smoker Friendly.

"People have not changed their consumption patterns," says Parameswar. "They have changed their purchasing patterns."

Stealing Share

One market dynamic in the tobacco industry is crystal clear: You want smokes, you go to a c-store or tobacco outlet. Convenience stores and tobacco outlets continue to grow

the tobacco business, while supermarkets,

mass and drug outlets do not aggressively promote the category. That means that the time is near that c-stores will be competing among themselves for the same consumer, as opposed to stealing consumers from other

channels. And of course, in a business running on minimal margins, volume is the name of the game in turning a profit.

"As we continue to take share from drug, mass and other channels that are walking away from the tobacco category in the middle of a shrinking universe, at some point in time we'll

The decline isn't nearly as steep as you are led to believe."

— Kent Raphael **Village Pantry**

reach the point of diminishing returns." says Bruce Earhart, director of marketing for Handee Marts, Inc. in Gibsonia, Pa. "That's where, as an industry, we'll just be taking share from each other - who's got the best deal this month, who's got the best contract. To some extent, you already see that."

Retailers will naturally look for more support from manufacturers.

"I think that cigarette manufacturers need to re-evaluate the buy-down process," says Fred Faulkner, merchandise manager for Jaco Oil's Fas-



▲ Mike Zielinski, president and CEO of Royal Buying Group

trip Food Stores in Bakersfield, Calif. "They need to allow the retailer to hold back some of the buy-down dollars or support the placement space to improve our profitability. Passing through 100 percent of the buy-down is not allowing us to maintain a reasonable margin."

"The profit for the industry is continuing to slowly erode," concedes Bishop. "It's harder for a retailer to make as much money per transaction as they used to, and there are a variety of reasons for that, primarily driven by the support that's provided by the manufacturer."

Bishop points to the move within the past 2-3 years by manufacturers to charge for display fixtures that once were free (to protect their own margins) as a major drain on the category's bottom line throughout the convenience trade.

Earhart supports Bishop's contention.

"The only company that's stopped offering racks completely is Reynolds," says Earhart. "Philip Morris still sup-

plies racks for you, depending on vour contract level. And I can still get fixtures from Lorillard, too."

But those days are coming to an

"I look for that to completely go away, and I think that will come real quick." continues Earhart. "I wouldn't be surprised if I saw that this year or certainly by 2006-2007 contract negotiations."

Which makes the OTP segment even more attractive to the c-store retailer. Not only is the market growing, not only are margins holding up, but OTP suppliers continue to offer free fixtures. But cigarettes will remain the mothership of the tobacco category.

"Sure, OTP still supplies fixturing, and that's going to help," says Earhart. "But as long as you're well-developed in the cigarette category as a convenience-store retailer, you have to maintain that presence. And you have to be able to do enough volume to secure contracts and get promotional monies."

So while challenges to the profitability of the category are very real, reports of its demise have been greatly exaggerated. And while OTP will continue to grow, it will be in addition to - rather than

at the expense of – cigarettes, which are expected to hold steady.

"I see the number of brands shrinking over the next five to ten years, but I really don't see the space shrinking down too much," says Faulkner. "You need to have the product out in front of the consumer."

Faulkner sees the number of retailers selling cigarettes declining over that period – but mostly from channels other than convenience. Indeed, nonconvenience retailers have already begun de-emphasizing the category.

"I think that if you are dedicated to selling cigarettes you will continue to do well," he savs. ■



Internet Connection Required

▲ Video: Southwest Convenience Stores' John West and Golden Pantry's Mike Griffith discuss their approach to tobacco merchandising.



SMOKELESS TOBACCO - A GROWING CATEGORY AT C-STORES.



Did you know?

In 2004, OTP jumped ahead of candy and salty snacks. It's now ranked 5th in average sales per store.*

New items are driving category growth at convenience stores:**

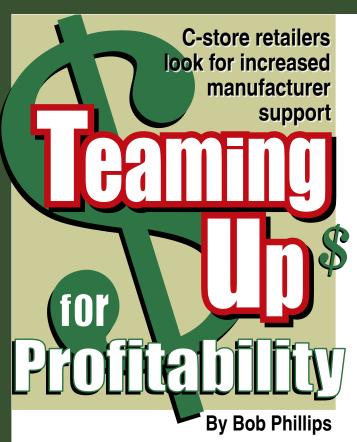
71%

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Source: *2005 NACS SOI Report **USSTC RAD SVT 2004 YTD Thru 10/30

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anufacturers and retailers both realize that cigarettes will remain a vital component in the overall product mix in the convenience channel, and that building true partnerships dedicated to the profitability of both parties is the ultimate blueprint for success in the category.

But will the supplier-retailer relationship actually improve in this challenged category?

"While tobacco sales are anticipated to decline a percent or two annually, tobacco is still an important part of our revenue stream," says Kevin Gardner, a spokesman for Dallasbased 7-Eleven Inc. "We will continue to plan our space to maximize stock

and inventory turns to make sure we have what our customers want when they want it."

One of the most important changes convenience retailers are looking for is planogram flexibility – i.e., allowing the retailer the ability to call shots in terms of brand and product mix.

"I see things staying pretty much the same over the next five years or so, but with retailers becoming more specialized," says Bruce Earhart, director of marketing for Gibsonia, Pa.-based <u>Handee Marts</u>, Inc. "By that, I mean understanding more what sells in the category, and allocating the space accordingly with individual-location planograms."

Toward that end, <u>Philip Morris USA</u> is pledging more flexibility in the future.

"I can't speculate on what the market will look like over five or ten years, but I can tell you we're going to have greater merchandising flexibility based on choices and rewards," says Dana Bolden, senior manager for media affairs at Philip Morris USA.

"One of the things we've heard from the convenience store channel is that we haven't been the most flexible partner to work with. So going forward, we think convenience retailers will see a lot more flexibility from Philip Morris USA." As part of the new flexibility policy, PMUSA promises retailers will have more of a voice in merchandising decisions.

"One of the complaints we get most often from our c-store leaders is that 'you [Philip Morris] always tend to dictate how much space you need to have, and that doesn't always work in our zip code," continues Bolden. "We're open to that, and we're going to offer that kind of flexibility. I think over the next few years you'll see [more of] that flexibility."

Both retailers and manufacturers recognize that the ultimate value of the cigarette category isn't so much from the profits derived directly from the category, but rather from ancillary purchases made by the cigarette customer.

"It's important to recognize that the inherent profitability flows not just from the sale of cigarettes, but from the foot traffic these sales generate that leads to sales of other products," says John Singleton, director of communications for the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co.

"Their market basket is larger," agrees Kent Raphael, vice president of merchandising for Indianapolis-based Village Pantry. "Your cigarette customer is usually the one who's also buying beer, coffee, and foodservice items." ■



Private Labels and Control Brands Gain Flavor

Recently, Liggett and Sunoco announced a multi-year agreement to market Silver Eagle cigarettes exclusively in the U.S. market. Silver Eagle is available in menthol and non-menthol flavors, including kings, 100's and box packs, at more than 800 Sunoco APlus outlets.

"Silver Eagle marks the beginning of an exciting new partnership between Sunoco and Liggett Vector Brands," Drew Kabakoff, Sunoco's national category manager for tobacco said in a prepared statement recently announcing the launch.

Silver Eagle, a price value cigarette, is the most recent addition to the company's "Partner Brands" program aimed at meeting the challenges in the retail market.



Private labels and control brands have become increasingly popular in an effort to provide value as well as guard against margin erosion on the low end of the price spectrum. Other retailers have partnered with manufacturers on similar non-exclusive brands.





roduct and packaging innovation has sparked growth in the sale of other tobacco products (OTP) recently, vaulting the category into the top five of those sold in convenience stores. And now may be the perfect time for retailers to begin capitalizing on that, according to a panel of OTP experts and researchers gathered for a CSPNetwork
CyberConference entitled "Building
Store Loyalty with OTP" recently.

According to the panel, overall growth in c-store sales and profits through the first three quarters of 2005 were outpaced by the growth in sales of OTP, which has caught the industry's attention as it examines more closely the tobacco category in the wake of excise-tax increases on cigarettes and the loss of display allowance revenue from cigarette manufacturers.

As the segments growth plays out, a look at the typical OTP customer reveals their value to the channel, according to David Portalatin, senior industry analyst with the NPD Group in Houston.

According to NPD data, the industry has been struggling for some time with customer visit frequency on a per-store basis, declining from about 8 visits per month in the third quarter of 2001 to under 7 visits per month in the third quarter of 2005. But OTP customers not only shop c-stores more frequently than non-OTP purchasers – more than 13 times per month on average – but they shop c-stores more frequently than purchasers of products in all other categories, including cigarettes.

"The [rising] gasoline price issue is a threat," Portalatin said. "It is contributing to a decline in customer traffic in the convenience channel. Retailers are going to have to engage intentional strategies to reverse that trend, and the OTP category makes a lot of sense as a category to leverage to reverse that [trend]."

According to data provided by CSX, LLC and presented by CSX Partner Gene Gerke, the average selling price of gasoline per gallon was up nearly 20% from July 2004 through July 2005. In addition, credit card fees were up nearly 30% over that period.

On the other hand, sales of OTP in c-stores were up nearly 8% and gross profit dollars on the products were up more than 15% through July 2005, trending ahead of an increase in inside sales of 4.8% in the industry and a 7% increase in gross profit dollars.

After outlining the strong sales growth OTP has seen in the past few years, the panel encouraged retailers to view the segment as independent of cigarettes and apply category management standards to it, including allocating the appropriate amount of space to the products and knowing what OTP consumers are looking for.

Your display should "tell me that you are in the [OTP] business" within 10 feet of walking in the door, said John Mayer, national tobacco and cigarette manager for distributor McLane Co., Temple, Texas. "A majority of OTP

The OTP category makes a lot of sense as a category to leverage to reverse that [trend]."

Dave Portalatin The NPD Group



Sales of OTP in convenience stores were up nearly 8 percent through July."

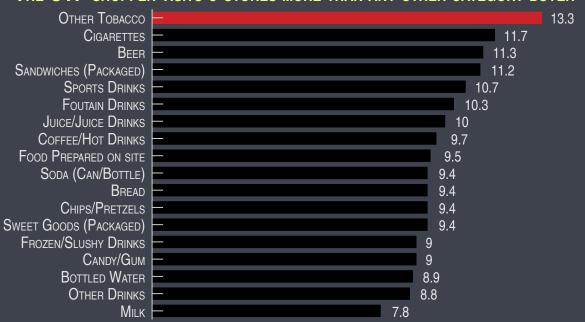
Gene Gerke CSX Partner



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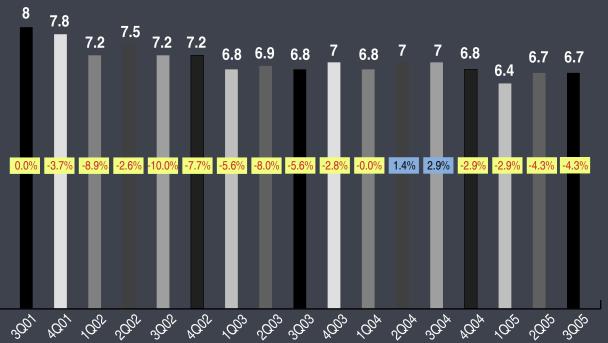
VISIT FREQUENCY (PER 30 DAYS) - 3Q05

THE OTP SHOPPER VISITS C-STORES MORE THAN ANY OTHER CATEGORY BUYER



AVERAGE VISIT FREQUENCY

AVERAGE VISIT FREQUENCY BY C-STORE SHOPPERS HAS BEEN DECLINING



Source: Convenience Store Monitor, The NPD Group, Inc 2005

consumers say OTP is the primary reason they are in the store. [And] when they come into a store, they have a preferred brand that they're looking for.... They know their flavors. They know their taste. They know what they're looking for, and in many cases, they're not going to substitute a different item for that [product]."

Joe Teller, senior manager of category management for Richmond, Va.based cigar and snuff manufacturer Swedish Match said c-stores own 45% share of all OTP sales, or about \$3.6 billion of the \$8-billion industry. He also offered some statistics illustrating what drives sales of particular products.

For moist snuff, 51% of consumers said they look for a low price, while 12% prefer a portion pouch. He said Swedish Match data show losing a premium snuff consumer to value-priced products is not necessarily a bad thing. "For every one can decline in premium [snuff], the industry gains 6.7 cans of value-priced snuff," he said.

For cigars, Teller said 54% of consumers look for flavored cigars and an additional 21% reported an interest in pipeflavored cigars. He added that single cigars continue to show great growth, with sales up 25% in the past year, compared to 9.3% growth for packs.

Portalatin said OTP consumers shop in c-stores nearly twice as often (13 times a month) as the average c-store customer. He also noted that OTP customers are big-basket shoppers, spending an average \$9.19 per c-store visit. Other products OTP consumers often purchase when visiting a c-store include single-serve, packaged sodas (43%), cigarettes (33%), beer (26%), fountain beverages (26%), candy/gum (20%) and coffee/hot drinks (18%). ■

Click here to view a free on-demand recording of the CyberConference, which was sponsored by Swedish Match North America (retailers only).



▲ Video: Open Pantry's Jim Fiene discusses his chains aggressive approach to OTP product selection and merchandising.

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Is 2005 still headed for a possible record year? After what appears to be a "September to Remember" (last year June and December were stellar months) CStoreXchange® (CSX's) proprietary database shows that retailers in their benchmarking intelligence system are looking pretty good year-to-date in several important performance measurements!

What's the score?

In their second year of quarterly How's Business reviews, CSX co-founder/partner Dick Meyer will examine same firm's key trends in their exclusive database of about 70 convenience chains representing approximately 3,000+ stores across the nation.

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Building Store Loyalty with OTP RECORDED ON:

Thursday, Oct. 20, 2005 2:00PM - 3:00PM ET 11:00AM - 12:00PM PT

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OTP, fueled by product and packing innovation, is now one of the five biggest categories inside the convenience store. In one of the great unsung stories in the convenience channel, Other Tobacco Products – the cigars and smokeless tobacco that historically played second fiddle to cigarettes – has emerged as one of the industry's most profitable and dynamic growth opportunities.

This special category management program features a team of leading authorities who not only will shed insight, but offer solutions to your questions:

- Gene Gerke, President, Gerke & Associates, Inc. Partner, CSX, LLC
- David Portalatin, Senior Industry Analyst, NPD Group Inc.
- John Mayer, National Tobacco and Cigarette Manager, McLane Co.

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Friday, December 2, 2005 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM ET 11:00 AM - 12:00 PT

Featuring Bonnie Herzog



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From litigation to lawsuits, taxation to manufacturer programs, there is no category that compares in complexity, opportunity and risk.

Smith Barney tobacco analyst Bonnie Herzog returns to CSPN, sifting through the maze of issues confronting convenience operators.

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