



GEORGIA Amusement JOURNAL

Dedicated to serving the Georgia COAM industry
Endorsed by the Georgia Amusement and Music Operators Association
paul@tashcommunications.com (406) 491-0100



A Tash Communications publication December 2024 Vol. 8, Number 8

Patel takes GAMOA helm

New president provides thoughts on industry, association

By Paul Tash, Georgia Amusement Journal

The Georgia Amusement and Music Operators Association (GAMOA) has worked diligently since its inception in 1982 to improve the business climate for the coin-operated amusement machine (COAM) industry in Georgia. One of the largest amusement associations in the country, GAMOA is a diverse organization working with Class A and B licenses throughout the state.

Leading such a multi-faceted and active organization takes commitment, but Mehul “Mike” Patel, founder of Ultimate Amusements, is ready for the challenge. Patel took over as GAMOA president in November, succeeding Shawn Fellows. Patel took the time recently to answer some questions from the Journal about the future of the industry, the benefits of the association, and how he became involved in the industry.

GAJ: What do you see as the most significant issues or challenges the COAM industry is facing?

Patel: One of the most significant challenges the COAM industry is facing would have to be the further successful adaptation of the gift card as a form of noncash redemption. Currently, the average player is not aware they can redeem for a gift card. An ongoing challenge that the COAM industry faces is the fact that COAM is the highest-taxed industry in the state. Based upon discussions with

See PATEL Page 6



Paul Tash photo

MIKE PATEL addresses GAMOA members last month during his first meeting as president of the association.



Amusement Expo registration now open

By Paul Tash

Georgia Amusement Journal

Registration is now open for the amusement industry’s biggest event of the year – the Amusement Expo International (AEI), set for March 17-20 in Las Vegas.

AEI25’s Education Conference will be held at the Westgate Hotel March 17-18, and the Expo follows on March 19-20 at the Las Vegas

Convention Center.

“AEI is recognized as one of the most engaging and inspiring events of the year,” AEI media information said. “As one of the fastest-growing trade shows in the country, it’s well organized, packed with educational content, and provides plenty of access to leading experts in the industry.”

Sur-

round yourself with industry experts and hear success stories that can significantly boost your business and inspire new perspectives on games and entertainment. AEI delivers a powerful dynamic setting – fast-paced and fun-filled to help turn your company into a thriving business.”

The popular trade show will feature vendors showcasing amusements

See EXPO Page 6

Play. Pay. Send. Voilà.

AGE VERIFICATION ✓
CASHOUT TO RTP VISA CARD ✓
CASHOUT TO SELECT RETAILER CARDS ✓

VISA DEBIT

Each time Players convert to Gift Card on the App, the LLH & MLH get a kickback of up to 10% in IC fees. LET'S RECOVER THOSE POINTS YOU LOST & THEN SOME! Schedule a call with us!

Call (912) PLAY.PAY (752.9729)
Email play@pay7.app

FINAL CALL TO COME ON DOWN



Amusement Games

**THIS IS IT.
LAST CHANCE
TO ORDER TODAY!**

Last chance to secure the
top-performing games in
the Georgia market.

Available for purchase through
end of 2024 ONLY.

**AVAILABLE ON THE HIGH-PERFORMING
COBALT™ 27 AMUSEMENT MACHINE.**

Contact SGS today at 404-662-7027 | orders@southerngamingsolutions.net



© 2024 IGT. All trademarks used herein are owned by IGT or its affiliates, may not be used without permission, and where indicated with a *, are registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Network, descriptions, game play, photographs, videos, and other product details depicted are subject to change. IGT is committed to socially responsible gaming. Our business solutions empower customers to choose parameters and practices that become the foundation of their Responsible Gaming programs.

**INTRODUCING JVL'S FLEX-PAY AND FLEX-PORT,
THE REVOLUTIONARY TECH
YOU'VE COME TO EXPECT FROM JVL.**

**YOUR COST OF CONVERTING YOUR MACHINES
WITH JVL'S TECHNOLOGY TO TICO IS...**

**ZERO,
NADA,
NOTHING...**

**IF ORDERED BEFORE DECEMBER 15TH, 2024.
CALL US AT (470) 359 5882 FOR MORE INFORMATION.**



6500 MCDONOUGH DRIVE NW, SUITE C9, NORCROSS, GA, 30093



Membership Application

Operators, Locations, Manufactures, Distributors & Suppliers

Company Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Main Contact _____
 Business Phone _____ Fax _____
 Cell _____ Email _____
 Secondary Contact _____
 Business Phone _____ Fax _____
 Cell _____ Email _____

Amusement Operators Membership: (Class A Master License Holders)

Amusement Operator 1-9 Employees \$350 GA MLH # _____
 Amusement Operator 10+ Employees \$500 GA MLH # _____

Amusement Operators Membership: (Class B or Class A & B Master License Holders)

Amusement Operator 1 – 20 Decals \$1,000 GA MLH # _____
 Amusement Operator 21+ Decals (\$52/Decal) \$ _____ GA MLH # _____
 21+ Decals One-time Payment Quarterly Monthly Number of Decals _____
 Quarterly & monthly payments due the by the 5th of each month.

Location Membership: (Location License Holders)

Location License Membership (1-4 Locations) \$100 GA LLH # _____
 Maximum Location License Membership (5+ Locations) \$500 GA LLH # _____

Associate Membership: (Manufacturers, Distributors, Supplies, Affiliated Associations & Industries)

Level 1 Membership Professional Services \$250
 Level 2 Membership Plush & Bulk \$500
 Level 3 Membership Parts & Service \$1,000 GA License # _____
 Level 4 Membership Distributor or Manufacturer \$2,000 GA License # _____

Total Membership Fees (Checked Category Above) \$ _____ Check Enclosed
Credit Card Number _____ Exp _____ CID _____
E-Check Account Number _____ Routing Number _____

Please make checks payable to GAMOA and mail this form with your check to:

GAMOA
 2095 HWY 211 NW • STE 2-F PMB 163
 Braselton, GA 30517

Join Online at www.gamoa.org/register.

If you have any questions, please call the GAMOA office at 770.408.0384 or email christina@gamoa.org.

Decommission COAMs correctly

The proper procedure to decommission coin-operated amusement machines (COAMs) can be found on the COAM Division website, www.gacoam.com. The COAM decommission procedure should be followed when there is:

- A change of master, change of ownership, or cancellation letter received by GLC;
- A COAM game board swapped out with a different game;
- A COAM malfunction.

To proceed with the decommissioning:

1. Call Intralot before disconnecting the COAMs from a location and removing those COAMs. The Master License Holder (MLH) needs to contact the Intralot Hotline at 877-261-6242 to properly decommission COAMs. The COAMs must be connected to the site controller at this time.



2. Intralot will let you know when the COAMs are decommissioned. The Intralot representative will perform steps on the Intralot system that prepares the COAMs for the decommission. Once the steps are complete, Intralot will notify the MLH the machines have been decommissioned.

3. Disconnect decommissioned COAMs from the site controller.

Decommissioned COAM(s) now can be removed from the location. It is imperative MLHs follow all operational and technical procedures in order to ensure accurate reporting of financial data to the Central Accounting System.

GEORGIA Amusement JOURNAL

Dedicated to serving the Georgia COAM industry

A Tash Communications publication PO Box 4307 Butte MT 59702
 Paul Tash paul@tashcommunications.com (406) 491-0100

A Tash Communications Publication

Georgia Amusement Journal Business and News Office:
 P.O. Box 4307, Butte, MT 59702
 • TEL: 406-491-0100 • E-MAIL: paul@tashcommunications.com

Paul Tash, Editor/Publisher
paul@tashcommunications.com
 Phone: 406-491-0100

Ad Production • paul@tashcommunications.com

Reprints of articles and back issues are available at a cost of \$20.
 If you wish to begin receiving the Georgia Amusement Journal, send your name, mailing address, telephone number and \$60 for a year's subscription to Georgia Amusement Journal, P.O. Box 4307, Butte, MT 59702.

Postmaster: Please send address change requests to
 P.O. Box 4307, Butte, MT 59702
 All rights reserved by publisher



This publication endorsed by the Georgia Amusement and Music Operators Association

COAM calendar

Jan. 20: Gross retail receipts report for October, November and December due. The gross retail receipts must be submitted electronically through the COAM website at www.gacoam.com. Failure to report on time may result in penalties.

— MEETINGS/OTHER —

Jan. 14: COAM Advisory Board, GA Lottery headquarters, downtown Atlanta

Feb. 20: GAMOA membership meeting, Hilton Atlanta Northeast, Peachtree Corners

May 15: GACS Southern Convenience Store and Petroleum Show, Macon, The Centreplex

Write us

The Georgia Amusement Journal welcomes letters to the editor. Letters must include the writer's name and address. The word limit is 300. Mail to Georgia Amusement Journal, P.O. Box 4307, Butte MT 59702, or you can email us at paul@tashcommunications.com. The Journal reserves the right not to print letters it finds objectionable.

Journal Opinion

Webinar to discuss legislative transition

Lori Schneider,
AMOA Executive Director

AMOA will host a webinar conducted by its legislative counsel, DGA Group, on Wednesday, Dec. 18, at 10 a.m. CST. John Russell will address the membership with a presentation titled, "Transition Update and What to Expect in the First 100 Days."

AMOA will continue its in-person visits to Washington, D.C., in late February and early March when committee leadership has been finalized. We will also continue our work on fair access to banking and advocate for small business as Congress addresses tax reform among other issues we continue to monitor.

AEI25 in March

Power up at AEI25 March 17-20 in Las Vegas at the Westgate and the nearby convention center!

You'll gain hands-on experience with the latest entertainment technology – including virtual reality – and have an opportunity to dive into the latest



Lori Schneider

We will continue to work on fair access to banking and advocate for small business as Congress addresses tax reform.



information to build your business with informative educational sessions. This, combined with the networking benefits of meeting with industry leaders shaping the future of our industry, makes AEI a wise invest-

ment for growing your business.

AEI features:

- Two days of valuable insights at our education sessions (March 17 and 18)
- Two days of innovation and fun on our trade show floor

(March 19 and 20)

• Networking opportunities every day! Organized networking events and informal opportunities abound give you a chance to trade pro tips with experts just like you from around the world.

AMOA members who have renewed their membership for 2025 can register for two free badges to the AEI trade show, so be sure to renew your 2025 membership today. Not a member? Be sure to join AMOA and receive all the annual benefits, plus your two free AEI trade show badges.

AMOA members are also invited to the AMOA member after-party on Wednesday night, March 19, at the Jewel nightclub in the Aria.

AMOA State Council

AMOA's next State Council meeting is Jan. 23-25 at the San Antonio Marriott Riverwalk in San Antonio, TX. Visit www.amoa.com for details on the State Council meeting and the many other AMOA member programs and services.

GACS foundation awards 18 scholarships

The Georgia Association of Convenience Stores (GACS) has awarded scholarships through its Education Foundation to 18 deserving young students across Georgia for the 2024-25 school year.

Reid Clifton was the 2024 recipient of the top \$2,000 Brittany Schmeelk Scholarship. Clifton is attending the University of Georgia.

GACS awarded over \$20,000 for the 2024-25 school year. GACS members support its Education Foundation through a membership dues check off and participation in other fundraisers throughout the year. Due to changes in the scholarship schedule, GACS was able to present the awards for the first time at high school awards ceremonies for students who are entering their freshman college year.

"Education scholarships are an exciting opportunity for all GACS members," GACS said. "As part of their membership investment with GACS, their employees and their children are eligible for scholarship awards from the GACS Education



Photo courtesy of GACS

REID CLIFTON holds his \$2,000 check after receiving the Brittany Schmeelk Scholarship from the GACS Education Foundation. Michael Sumner presented the check to Clifton, who is currently attending the University of Georgia as a freshman. GACS Education Foundation scholarship awards are available to employees (and their children) of all current GACS-member companies, including stores, offices and active representatives in Georgia.



Foundation."

Awards ranged from \$1,000 to \$2,000. This year three new awards were offered:

- A second \$1,500 B Average or Better Scholarship.
- A \$1,000 Outstanding Volunteerism Scholarship.
- A \$1,000 Business School Student Scholarship.

"This program can be a tremendous benefit to families," GACS said.

Foundation scholarship awards are available to all current GACS-member companies, including stores, offices and active representatives located in Georgia.

Anyone interested in sponsoring a new scholarship or creating a scholarship program exclusively for their employees can visit www.gacs.com/scholarships for more information.

Patel

from Page 1

operators and other individuals, it appears that there will be increased sales tax revenues for the state and local governments due to the use of the gift card by COAM players.

What are the industry's most significant opportunities in the near future?

Patel: The biggest opportunity is the utilization of a TiTo/card type system and gift cards for redemption via a manual process or through a self-service kiosk or an app-based platform.

We'll continually look for opportunities to grow the industry, and we'll do so knowing that the industry's vital contributions to HOPE Scholarship and Pre-K educational programs in the state will grow as well. Since the legislation in 2013 that created the successful regulatory environment the industry enjoys today, the COAM industry has contributed about \$857 million to those education programs, including \$142 million in Fiscal Year 2024 alone.

The COAM industry has evolved in the last 10-plus years since regulation. What will the industry look like in another 10 years?

Patel: I wish I had a crystal ball! In terms of player experience,

there should be monumental progress with new technology being implemented and new skill-based games being introduced to the marketplace. I would expect the number of locations to grow and master licensees will appreciate the need for world-class customer service.

GAMOA has proven to be quite effective in representing the COAM industry. What are the strengths and benefits of the association?

Patel: GAMOA's strengths are in its numbers. GAMOA is currently the strongest state-based amusement association in the nation. It has the greatest participation, which ultimately makes it quite effective in representing the industry.

We try to make GAMOA as beneficial for its members as possible. Members will always have a way to stay informed about current trends, regulation changes, and best practices through the attendance at our quarterly meetings and publications. We have a responsive staff that has always addressed any problems the industry faces. Everyone who attends our annual Southern Amusement & Entertainment (SAEE) trade show, typically in August, will find everything a mas-

ter licensee would need to operate in Georgia, from guidance of the laws to the latest games available.

We are actively engaged in developing programs that can help Georgia citizens.

We are also proud of the amazing contributions from our members to a variety of charitable causes. A specific fundraising effort following the SAEE awards banquet has raised over \$1 million in four years for Bert's Big Adventure, which sends chronically and terminally ill children and their families to Disney World for a free, five-day dream vacation.

Since regulation, the industry continues to build a strong relationship with regulators. How important is that and how does it impact future growth?

Patel: Having a strong and honest relationship with regulators is critical. I believe GAMOA works in good faith to strengthen and improve the industry, which should make life easier for the regulator and participants. GAMOA has always worked with regulators in good faith in terms of future growth and a quality amusement experience. Along with our regulators, the industry cooperates with the legislative oversight commit-

tees for the industry. Our goal is to be the best COAM industry in the country, which will provide the best game experience for our players.

You've been a part of the COAM industry for many years. How did you get started?

Patel: I graduated from the University of Georgia in 2001. After working for a year or so in my studied field, I decided that I wanted to have a more entrepreneurial experience and own my own business. With minimal capital, I first operated convenience stores. From there I became interested in the COAM business and wanted to provide COAMs to a variety of businesses.

My partner and I then secured a Class B master license and became Ultimate Amusements. Building our business one customer at a time and providing world class service, we grew our business and expanded our base of locations to become a medium-sized operator.

You've been blessed with a wonderful family ... what can you say about them?

Patel: I have a wife, Nilam Patel, and two kids, Layla and Dev Patel, who have supported me through this entrepreneurial effort.

I am a Georgia native and am interested in making sure the quality of life for all Georgians continues to improve. GAMOA members share that vision.



Expo

from Page 1

and games, music and jukeboxes, bulk vending and merchandising, ATMs and cashless solutions, professional services and more.

Booth reservations for this year's event have already surpassed last year's total. The trade show floor promises to showcase cutting-edge technology, personalized experiences, and innovative systems designed to meet evolving consumer demands.

Exclusive experiences

AEI's unique combination of features sets this award-winning event apart from many others, ensuring an unmatched experience for all. Attendees can expect:

- Exclusive opportunities to immerse yourself in the latest one-of-a-kind games coming into the market
- Relevant, actionable insights for your business – not broad, general information
- Access to speakers for more meaningful discussions

- Practical strategies you can immediately apply to your business
- Focused learning for all levels of your business

- **Human Resources:** Learn how to build strong, creative teams that drive success in this competitive and unique industry.



Educational opportunities

AEI25's Education Conference has established itself as a crucial training platform for professionals in the out-of-home entertainment industry. This comprehensive event caters to a diverse range of market sectors, including route operators, location-based entertainment venues, family entertainment centers, arcades, recreation centers, and so much more. Topics include:

- **AI:** One of AEI's most popular topics covering the latest developments in artificial intelligence as well as the trends and initiatives that are shaping the game industry.
- **Arcade:** Arcades are experiencing an incredible revival fueled by nostalgia and innovation. Hear about the latest in profit for play.
- **The Future of Location-Based Amusements:** Learn what key trends are shaping an industry

evolving in response to changing consumer preferences and advancement in game technology.

The Education Conference also offers a fun and informative learning opportunities that include:

- Engaging speaker presentations from industry experts.
- Informative breakout sessions.
- Keynote luncheon.
- Hands-on workshops.
- Peer-to-peer networking.
- Panel discussions on critical industry topics.

"By attending this powerhouse conference, participants can ensure they remain competitive and innovative in this competitive industry," AEI media information said.

Hotel options expand

AEI has also expanded its hotel options for AEI25. Now, in addition to the Westgate Hotel, a limited number of rooms will be available at the popular Resorts World. Hotel registration is now available.

For more information, visit www.amusementexpo.org.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS



CASINO STYLE GAMING



LIGHT & WONDER™

Contact Rick Murphy for More Information:
(770) 316-0945 | rmurphy@betson.com

The look and feel of the games and their individual components and displays are trade dress of Light & Wonder, Inc. and its subsidiaries. All © notices signify marks registered in the United States. © 2024 Light & Wonder, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

©2024 Light & Wonder. All Rights Reserved.



AURORA PLUS

Now Available For Georgia Market

Includes FIVE Boards on ONE Board

Call Us Today To Get Yours 678-291-0290



WWW.IVEYPROMOTIONS.COM

NEW WAYS TO PLAY, NEW WAYS TO REDEEM!

We have what you need to help grow your business!









(252) 329-7977
banillagames.com

INCREDIBLE PERFORMANCE 3X MARKET AVERAGE*

THE STARTING LINEUP



Adam Foust

470.420.7940 • afoust@skillmasterpro.com • skillmasterpro.com



*Source: Aristocrat Internal database. Not a guarantee of performance.
©2024 Aristocrat Technologies Australia Pty Limited.

JENKA LAB®

NEW RELEASE

AURORA
X^Perience
NORTHERN



jenkalab.com

All rights reserved 2024

Gaming companies change leaders

Fernandez moves to IGT

Rege Behe, CDC Gaming

Hector Fernandez will lead the upcoming merger of International Gaming Technology (IGT) and Everi as CEO, the two companies announced earlier this month.

Fernandez is resigning as CEO of Aristocrat Gaming after six years with the company and two years as CEO.

Fernandez will join the combined enterprise by the fourth quarter of 2025 after a customary non-compete period expires. IGT President of Global Gaming Nick Khin will lead the combined enterprises as interim CEO until Fernandez joins the companies.



FERNANDEZ

“We’re thrilled to name Hector Fernandez as the future CEO of the combined enterprise,” said Apollo Global Management Partner Daniel Cohen in a statement. “As we look to position IGT Gaming and Everi as a premier, diversified customer-centric platform at the forefront of innovation in the gaming and fintech industries, Hector brings an impressive track record of successfully scaling operations and strengthening customer relationships while being a champion for strong values. Hector shares our vision to lead this talented global workforce and will foster a people-first culture across the combined enterprise.

A release stated that during his tenure at Aristocrat, Fernandez created and led several strategic initiatives that enabled gains in market share across multiple verticals while delivering strong revenue growth and increased profitability.

“I couldn’t be more excited to be part of this journey with IGT Gaming and Everi,” Fernandez said. “I look forward to partnering with the very talented teams at both companies, as well as the Apollo team leading the transaction.”

Following closing, the combined enterprise will be organized into three business units: Gaming, digital, and fintech.

Toner to lead Aristocrat

Rege Behe, CDC Gaming

Aristocrat Leisure Limited this month announced that Craig Toner, former chief financial officer and executive vice president of operations, has been appointed CEO of Aristocrat Gaming. Toner replaces Hector Fernandez, who resigned to accept the role of CEO at the combined enterprise of IGT and Everi.

Toner will start as Aristocrat Gaming’s CEO effective immediately.

“Craig has been a key part of the Aristocrat Gaming leadership team that has delivered strong growth and transformational change over recent years,” said Aristocrat CEO and Managing Director Trevor Croker in a statement. “He has also worked closely with our board and executive steering committee on a number of major and strategic operational priorities.



TONER

“Craig is people oriented, highly collaborative, and impactful. We are delighted to be able to elevate a proven and capable leader of Craig’s caliber to this role, demonstrating again the depth of talent we have built at Aristocrat.”

Toner has worked for Aristocrat, both in the U.S. and Australia, for seven years. He relocated to Las Vegas three years ago after serving in several business finance and operation roles for Aristocrat in Sydney, Australia.

“Craig will ensure a seamless leadership transition, maintaining a relentless customer focus, continuing to execute our plans,” Croker said. “Aristocrat Gaming today is a global team with extraordinary resilience, depth, and momentum, and I have every confidence that Craig will continue to build on this going forward, with the support of the many talented leaders across our global business.

“We thank Hector sincerely for his commitment and recognize his contribution to our businesses over the last six years.”

**COIN OPERATED AMUSEMENT MACHINE
LOCATION SWEEP AND MASTER PUSH CALENDAR**

COAM JULY-DEC 2024 COAM

ACCOUNTING WEEK START	ACCOUNTING WEEK END	LOCATION SWEEP DATE	MASTER PUSH DATE
28-Jul-24	03-Aug-24	07-Aug-24	13-Aug-24
04-Aug-24	10-Aug-24	14-Aug-24	20-Aug-24
11-Aug-24	17-Aug-24	21-Aug-24	27-Aug-24
18-Aug-24	24-Aug-24	28-Aug-24	04-Sep-24*
25-Aug-24	31-Aug-24	04-Sep-24	10-Sep-24
01-Sep-24	07-Sep-24	11-Sep-24	17-Sep-24
08-Sep-24	14-Sep-24	18-Sep-24	24-Sep-24
15-Sep-24	21-Sep-24	25-Sep-24	01-Oct-24
22-Sep-24	28-Sep-24	02-Oct-24	08-Oct-24
29-Sep-24	05-Oct-24	09-Oct-24	16-Oct-24*
06-Oct-24	12-Oct-24	16-Oct-24	22-Oct-24
13-Oct-24	19-Oct-24	23-Oct-24	29-Oct-24
20-Oct-24	26-Oct-24	30-Oct-24	05-Nov-24
27-Oct-24	02-Nov-24	06-Nov-24	13-Nov-24*
03-Nov-24	09-Nov-24	13-Nov-24	19-Nov-24
10-Nov-24	16-Nov-24	20-Nov-24	27-Nov-24*
17-Nov-24	23-Nov-24	27-Nov-24	03-Dec-24
24-Nov-24	30-Nov-24	04-Dec-24	10-Dec-24
01-Dec-24	07-Dec-24	11-Dec-24	17-Dec-24
08-Dec-24	14-Dec-24	18-Dec-24	24-Dec-24
15-Dec-24	21-Dec-24	26-Dec-24*	02-Jan-25*
22-Dec-24	28-Dec-24	02-Jan-25*	08-Jan-25*

*Indicates sweep or push date has been changed to accommodate holiday
Note: Holidays on a Thursday and Friday may delay the availability of the Location Period Accounting Report on the following Monday

CONNECT Pacific®

Ready to Revolutionize your business model?
With an average ROI of 40 days the Connect Pacific® kiosk is proven to outperform and outlast competitors.

Treat your customers to over 100+ top performing RiverSweeps games through our kiosk.

Learn More:
ati.sc
701-829-0191

SOLD HERE

INAMAX
POWERED BY ULTRA

INAMAX is proud to be the exclusive trusted COAM partner for Kroger!



AS SEEN IN KROGER

LIGHT & WONDER

NEWEST games in the Georgia market — **be the first to try!**

FORT KNOX III "BEST OF"

ALL-TIME FAVORITE games, all in one cabinet!

JVL GAMES

INSTANT increase in cash-in!

INAMAX GAMES PERFORM **16% HIGHER** THAN THE GA AVERAGE!!!

Choose excellence. Choose INAMAX.

To speak to a sales manager or learn more about Inamax:
Call 770.449.0400 ext. 700 or email info@inamax.com

Scan the QR code to learn more about getting started!



Retail Matters

Stretching a dollar

C-store shoppers looking for value

Angela Hanson

Convenience Store News

There's more than one reason to feel optimistic when taking a broad view of the U.S. economy.

While challenges undoubtedly persist, unemployment is low, inflation is coming down and the economy itself appears resilient, according to National Retail Federation Chief Economist Jack Kleinhenz. Individual consumers, however, have more than one reason to feel pessimistic.

Inflation may be moderating, but its long tail continues to have an impact on day-to-day purchase decisions. Several retail industry experts have observed larger numbers of consumers who are living within a budget, seeking ways to wring the most out of every dollar and cutting back in certain areas to make sure they can still get what they most desire.

A deal is what they're after these days. According to the 2024 Convenience Store News Realities of the Aisle Study, which surveyed 1,500 consumers who shop a c-store at least once a month, 59% of participants cited the price of products as the No. 1 factor that defines a positive shopping experience for them – up 5 points from a year ago.

It's no surprise then that operators are rushing to demonstrate that the best way consumers can spend their money is with them – particularly in food service, which saw a bevy of summertime specials. In July, McDonald's announced the extension of its \$5 Meal Deal, while Krispy Krunchy Chicken debuted a \$4 Value Meal. Fast-casual and quick-service restaurants also have explored a variety of limited-time offers targeted at cost-conscious consumers.

It is clear that convenience store retailers must act purposefully

in planning and promoting the value they offer. But one-size-fits-all deals won't do the trick – operators must understand the details of what shoppers want, how they want it and what they're willing to pay for it.

"Our data still indicates that consumers are making price-conscious decisions, whether that is trading down to value-based retailers or making multiple visits to different retailers," said Elizabeth Lafontaine, director of research at foot traffic analytics firm Placer.ai, headquartered in Santa Cruz, Calif. "However, we've seen pockets of traffic growth among specialty categories that are promising."

As a concept, value is deceptively simple. Lafontaine noted that in terms of today's consumers, the word carries two distinct definitions: the price paid or perceived savings on an item or during a shopping occasion; and the more intangible elements of the shopping experience such as convenience, service and product quality, all of which leads to overall customer satisfaction.

The right balance

For convenience retailers, the effects of ongoing inflationary pressures and high interest rates don't have a single point of impact. Instead, they have "rippled through all areas of business," according to Chris Hartman, vice president of fuels, advertising and development at York, Pa.-based Rutter's, the operator of 80-plus c-stores.

"We've seen some customers making choices and avoiding impulse decisions, which differs from 2021 and early 2022. Tobacco is probably the biggest area that has been impacted across our industry, with customers trading down due



to price increases," he said. "However, our breadth of offerings at Rutter's has helped mitigate some of the economic impact, as our customer base is very diverse."

Hartman pointed out that although price point is an important component of value – particularly in food service – quality and speed of service also drive customer behavior. The goal, he said, should be to find a balance rather than race to the bottom.

"Customers have unique needs and therefore, our stores offer a variety of items at different price points with wait times that meet, or exceed, customer expectations," he continued. "However, our mantra is

to never sacrifice quality for price. That has resonated with our customers and helped us continue to see sales growth."

Michael Bloom, chief marketing and merchandising officer at GPM Investments LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of ARKO Corp., reported that customers are making fewer c-store shopping trips but buying more per trip. "This is a helpful indicator to businesses, so they can adjust their promotions and offerings accordingly," he said.

The Richmond, Va.-based retailer makes it a point to emphasize different aspects of its value offer across the company's network of 1,500-plus stores and 34 banners.

"Our approach to value as a concept also has several different meanings. We are very convenient, which adds value as customers don't have to drive far, which adds savings. We have a loyalty program, which adds significant value by way of price and flexibility for enrolled members," Bloom told CSNews.

magnolia
GAMING

Your #1 Choice
for COAMs

Coin Operated Amusement Machines

Specializing in corporate accounts

WE ARE READY
FOR COAM GIFT CARDS!

(877) 241-4429
magnoliagaming.com

TO REPORT
**FRAUD, ABUSE OR
CASH PAYOUTS**
related to the operation of coin
operated amusement machines,
please call GLC's confidential
TIPLINE (855) 515-0004

DIAMOND
AMUSEMENTS
Play, Win, Repeat....

Phone: 770-285-1023
Email: info@diamondamuse.com

Use correct email for record request

The COAM Division is reminding licensees who want to request COAM records (excluding arbitration records) to use the email COAMOpenRecords@galottery.org. Requests sent to other emails or individuals will not be processed.

Requests may take two to three weeks to process due to the need to redact sensitive information like Social Security numbers, account details, dates of birth, and other personal identifying information (PII) that is exempt from public disclosure.

Licensees should not submit requests for proprietary COAM records, such as licensee revenue data or customer information, as these will not be provided.

Happy Holidays

From Your Friends at:

Tash Communications

Retail Matters

7-Eleven's future could include IPO

Melissa Kress

Convenience Store News

Big changes could be coming to 7-Eleven Inc.

Reports indicate the \$58 billion management buyout offer of Seven & i Holdings Co. Ltd. currently on the table would include plans for an initial public offering (IPO) of the North American convenience store business, according to BNN Bloomberg.

Citing people with knowledge of the matter, the news outlet reported the IPO is being considered as the optimal way to quickly pay down loans that would be extended by three of Japan's biggest banks in the buyout.

Irving-based 7-Eleven operates, franchises and/or licenses more than 13,000 stores in the United States and Canada. In addition to 7-Eleven stores, it operates and

franchises Speedway, Stripes, Laredo Taco Co., and Raise the Roost Chicken and Biscuits locations.

Junro Ito, son of Seven & i founder Masatoshi Ito and current vice president and representative director, and his private company Ito-Kogyo Co. Ltd., made the buyout proposal in late November. Ito-Kogyo currently holds a stake of approximately 8% in Seven & i, as Convenience Store News previously reported.

The news of a possible IPO comes as the Tokyo-based parent company of 7-Eleven tries to fend off an acquisition bid by Alimentation Couche-Tard Inc. Couche-Tard initially submitted a friendly, nonbinding proposal to Seven & i this summer. Seven & i subsequently rejected the \$39 billion bid, responding that the offer failed to meet the company's standalone value or its opportu-



nity to generate greater value in the near future.

Within a month, Couche-Tard upped its offer by 22% to roughly \$47 billion – a bid it continues to stand by.

Laval, Quebec-based Couche-Tard is the parent company of the Circle K brand. Any acquisition would unite two of the largest convenience retailers in the

world.

A 7-Eleven IPO would raise more than \$6.65 billion in cash to help pay down the nearly \$60 billion in loans by Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group Inc., Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group Inc. and Mizuho Financial Group Inc. and any other institutions, one person told the news outlet.

According to BNN Bloomberg, plans show that the Ito family and Itochu Corp. want to convince Seven & i's board to recommend their management buyout over Couche-Tard's proposal.

Seven & i intends to retain a stake in the business after any potential listing, some of the people added.

A representative for Seven & i wasn't immediately able to comment. Similarly the news outlet's attempts to contact the Ito family office didn't elicit a response.

LOWEST PRICE, HIGHEST REVENUE

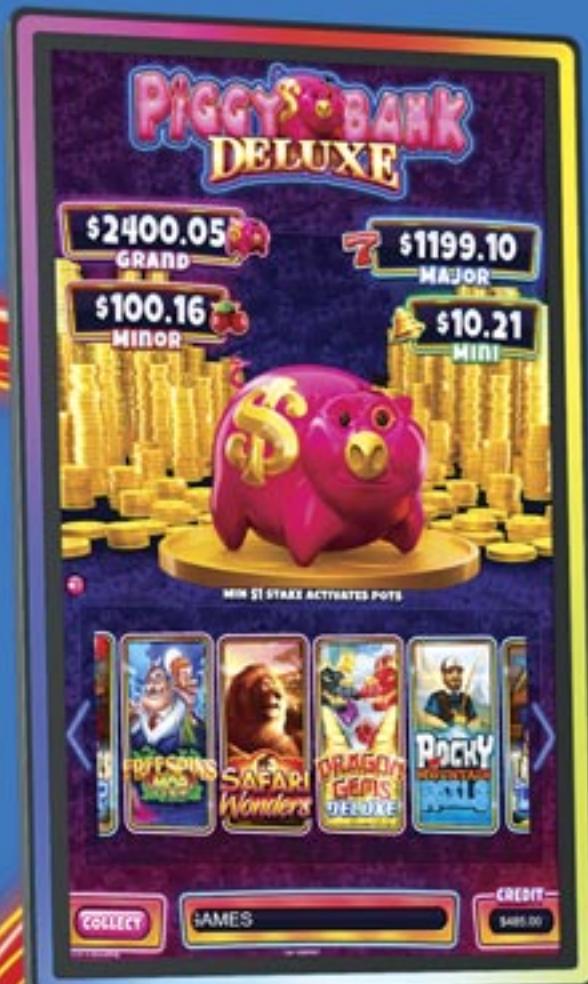


DUAL SAS GAME BOARDS



SMALL FOOTPRINT HUGE IMPACT!

Optimize your floor space with our new ASTRO Cabinet series. With a small footprint, lightweight build and affordability, ASTRO is a smart choice for operators.



- Compact, sleek design
- Low cost, high earnings
- Ease of access & serviceability
- Multiple configurations

Contact Your Account Manager
info@primerogames.com | 770.476.0311