



New IGT games coming

Whitman marks dual milestones

By Paul Tash
Georgia Amusement Journal
As Georgia’s COAM market continues to grow and evolve since 2013 legislation regulated the industry, one constant has been the prominence of Southern Gaming Solutions (SGS).

SGS President Angela Whitman in August will mark two milestones – 20 years in the COAM industry and 10 years with SGS – and she’s looking forward to pushing the company’s leadership position in Georgia in the future.
“I remain super passionate about the industry,” she told the

Journal recently. “It’s been a decade of trust and loyalty and performance. SGS has been built on relationships and taking care of our customers, and that part won’t change.”

Southern Gaming Solutions was founded by industry trailblazer Lee Hunter, who died unexpectedly in 2022, and Whitman said he is still deeply missed. Whitman said she’s grateful for the opportunity Hunter gave her to lead the company and is proud that she is one of a few women in leadership roles in the industry.

“I’ve proven that I belong, and

See WHITMAN Page 8



SGS photo

SOUTHERN GAMING Solutions President Angela Whitman, right, stands with Amber Carter, sales account manager.

Southern Expo expands education, trade show

By Paul Tash
Georgia Amusement Journal
Registration for attendees and vendors is now open for the ever-expanding Southern Amusement & Entertainment Expo (SAEE), which is returning to the Gas South Convention

Center Aug. 19-21 in Duluth, GA.
“The Expo will feature several enhancements this year,” said Christina Kaiser, executive director of the Georgia Amusement and Music Operators Association



(GAMOA), which is managing the show. “We want to continue to build on what already is the leading coin-op trade show in the Southeastern United States.”
The agenda this year will expand to

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GACS convention Aug. 15-17 at Amelia Island

Georgia Amusement Journal
The Georgia Association of Convenience Stores (GACS) will host its 2025 Annual Meeting and Convention Aug. 15-17 at the Omni Amelia Island Plantation in Amelia Island, FL.
With a theme titled “GACS Fables & the Ten Minute Tales,” the convention will feature member stories woven throughout the entire convention program, the organization said in its convention brochure. Additionally, “five very familiar faces”

will share their specific stories during the Saturday morning education session “in a new and lively” 10-minute format. Those five are Britt Davidson of Parker’s Kitchen, Samantha Gause of Inland Stores, Michael Junk of Quik-Trip, Sagar Patel of Susie Q’s, and KC Kingsbury from the National Association of Convenience Stores.
“GACS is a unique combination of fellowship, family and service to the industry, unlike no other organization in our state,” the brochure said. “Membership in

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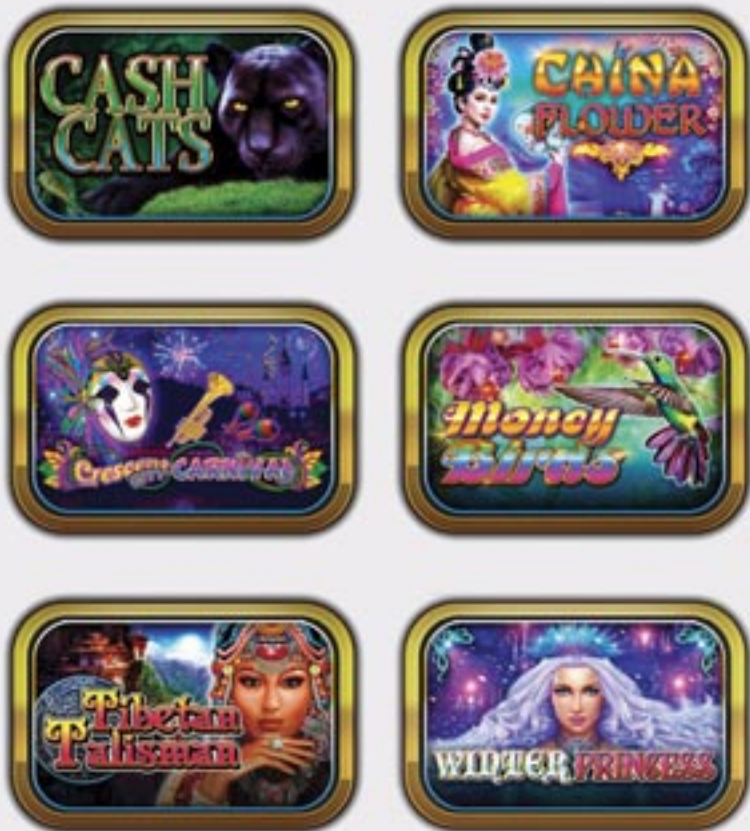
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Journal Opinion

Industry partners talk issues in D.C.

Lori Schneider,
AMOA Executive Director
The AMOA and AAMA partnered together to conduct an industry “fly-in” June 9-11 in our nation’s capital.

Combined, the associations hosted 28 industry members over a two-and-a-half-day legislative advocacy event representing all facets of the industry, from route operations all the way up to manufacturing.

On Monday evening, the DGA Group, legislative counsel for both AMOA and AAMA, hosted a briefing and dinner to prepare attendees for Tuesday and Wednesday visits on Capitol Hill.

Our message to Congressional offices included:

Small business taxes – We support the effort to make the small business deduction permanent, but need changes to SALT – Specified Service Trades or Businesses (SSTBs) should enjoy the same treatment as c-corporations.

Debanking – It is not just technology companies being debanked. Small businesses that rely on cash transactions see their bank account closed with no explanation, no appeal and 30 days to find a new bank. Cash should not be criminalized.



Lori Schneider

For AMOA, the debanking issue made a strong impact in several offices with follow-up work to be done.



Impact of tariffs – We are an “exporter” of product, and while we acknowledge the strategic value of tariffs to support American-made products, we have already seen an impact on our ability to source components as well as plush/toys and a willingness for buyers to engage. The supply chain has been severely disrupted.

Credit Card Competition Act – Monopolies seldom serve the consumer’s best wishes, and currently two credit card companies enjoy a monopoly by controlling 80% of the market.

Conducting close to 30 meetings over the span of a day and a half, the delegation conducted meaningful conversations with key staffers along with a couple of meetings with mem-

bers of Congress. For AMOA, the debanking issue made a strong impact in several offices with follow-up work to be done.

On Wednesday afternoon, the associations hosted a product spotlight event where staffers were invited to have some fun and play our games while learning more about the industry. It was special to see the joy on their faces when they walked into the room.

To close out the event, those in attendance enjoyed attending the annual Congressional Ballgame at Nationals Park on Wednesday evening.

Save the date!
AMOA On Campus Program
Oct. 22-24, 2025
Westin Chicago Northwest
Itasca, IL

AMOA on the Road Program
Oct. 22-23, 2025
Westin Chicago Northwest
Itasca, IL

AMOA State Council Meeting
Jan. 28-30, 2026
Orlando, FL

Amusement Expo International
March 16-19, 2026
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Visit www.amoa.com for more.

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COAM calendar

July 20: Gross retail receipts for April, May and June are 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 —

- July 15:** COAM Advisory Board, GLC headquarters, downtown Atlanta
- Aug. 15-17:** GACS Convention, Omni Plantation, Amelia Island, FL
- Aug. 19-21:** Southern Amusement & Entertainment Expo, Gas South Convention Center, Duluth, GA
- Oct. 6-9:** G2E, Sands Expo Convention Center, Las Vegas

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 email us at paul@tashcommunications.com. The Journal reserves the right not to print letters it finds objectionable.

50 years in the business



Photo courtesy of Paul Patel

SAM WESTGATE, center left with wife Rhonda, stands with Shawn Fellows, left, and Paul Patel, right, last month in Illinois. J&J Ventures honored Westgate for his 50 years in the amusement industry. Though based in Illinois, Westgate is well-known in Georgia COAM circles, working with a variety of companies and

“wearing a lot of hats,” he told the Journal. He attributed his longevity to “no FUD” (no fear, uncertainty or doubt). Westage, 67, said he has no plans to retire. “I have a lot of things I still need to do,” he said. Fellows is past president of GAMOA, while Patel is a GAMOA director.

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GACS

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GACS, with its advocacy platform, education and networking opportunities, and essential services, is becoming key to success in the convenience industry. There’s much to celebrate – starting with you, our valued members.”

The agenda includes a welcome reception on Thursday night, recreation on Friday morning (when it’s not so hot outside), musical entertainment after the awards dinner on Friday night, a legislative panel, a legislative reception, a revamped beach party on Saturday, and motivational speaker Kyle Vowinkel of Elite Mindsets on Saturday “who just might knock your socks off,” the brochure said.

The recreation options on Friday include a fishing tournament and a golf tournament. The awards banquet Friday night honors those members whose contributions have helped shape the GACS organization: GACS sponsors, supplier of the year, the Brittany Schmeelk Scholarship winner, new board of directors and supplier committee members, and many more.

The silent auction will open Friday night during the welcome reception and again on Saturday night before dinner. Winners will be announced on Saturday night before dinner. Donated items will be listed on the GACS website.

Attendees will also have an opportunity to raise money for students, along with a chance to win cash. The GACS Educational Foundation provides scholarship funds for GACS members and their families. Raffle tickets are available online now and on-site. Tickets are \$100, and the winner will be awarded \$5,000 at Friday night’s raffle.

Registration is still available at www.gacs.com/events. GACS has negotiated special hotel pricing for attendees at the Omni Amelia Island Plantation, but reservations must be received no later than 5 p.m., July 11.

Email the GACS office, admin@gacs.com, for more information.

Schedule of Events	
Thursday, August 14, 2025	
Time	Event
3:30 - 6:30 PM	GACS Registration Open
6:30 - 6:30 PM	Welcome Reception
9:30 - 12:30 AM	Hospitality Suite
Friday, August 15, 2025	
Time	Event
7:30 AM - 7:00 PM	GACS Registration Open
8:00 AM	Fishing Tournament
8:30 AM	Golf Tournament
10:00 AM - 2:00 PM	Table Top Set Up for Vendor Showcase
2:00 - 4:00 PM	GACS Board of Directors Meeting
2:00 - 3:00 PM	GACS Supplier Committee Meeting
3:00 PM	General Supplier Meeting (open to all GACS Supplier Members)
6:00 PM	Cocktail Reception
7:00 PM	Awards and Recognition Dinner/ Music Entertainment
9:30-12:30 AM	Hospitality Suite
Saturday, August 16, 2025	
Time	Event
7:00 AM - 7:00 PM	GACS Registration Open
7:30 AM	Breakfast and Education Sessions
	Speakers/ Education
8:00 - 9:00 AM	Kyle Vowinkel: <i>Leadership</i>
9:05 - 10:05 AM	Your Peers, Their Stories: Five Speakers, 10 Slides in 10 Minutes
	Britt Davidson, Parker's Kitchen: <i>Loss Prevention</i>
	Samantha Gause, Inland Stores: <i>Customer Engagement</i>
	Michael Junk, QuikTrip: <i>Public Affairs</i>
	KC Kingsbury, NACS: <i>State of the Industry</i>
	Sagar Patel, Susie Q's: <i>Hemp</i>
10:10 AM - 12:15 PM	Legislative Panel
12:15 - 12:30 PM	Annual Meeting plus Announcements
12:30 - 2:00 PM	Lunch with the Vendors and Vendor Showcase
2:30 - 4:30 PM	Beach Party
5:30 - 6:15 PM	Young Professionals Reception with the Legislators
6:15 - 7:00 PM	Legislative Reception
7:00 - 8:30 PM	Dinner and Surprise Entertainment
8:30 PM - Midnight	Hospitality Suite Open
Sunday, August 17, 2025	
Time	Event
7:00 AM - Noon	GACS Registration Open
8:00 AM	Breakfast "To Go"
(Note: Silent Auction will close at 7:00 pm on Saturday night.)	





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Whitman

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that our customers can depend on me,” she said.

SGS became the exclusive distributor of IGT machines in 2015, the year Whitman joined the company from Midtown Vending, which Hunter also founded.

“Our partnership with SGS has thrived on trust, commitment, mutual respect and a dedication to excellence, and Angela has played a significant role in that,” said Tim Shortall, IGT vice president of eastern region sales.

Whitman’s leadership and her great relationship with IGT has helped usher in a new era for compelling products, solutions and content in the Georgia COAM market. With such a strong foundation in place, IGT and SGS have driven player engagement and excitement in gaming, while advancing the performance of COAM products.

“Our track record of strong performance is a testament to Angela’s leadership and our great partnership,” Shortall added. “We expect continued success in the Georgia COAM market.”

In fact, SGS and IGT will soon introduce the new Winning Touch Georgia game set – featuring six unique and market-attuned themes “on the most premium cabinet available in Georgia COAM,”

the IGT PeakCurve49, Shortall said. The products will be available at the Southern Amusement and Entertainment Expo in August.

Whitman said she’s very excited about the new machine, adding that it could eclipse the tremendously successful Price is Right game, which has reached its sunset. She praised IGT’s content team for creating games that have been so successful in Georgia.

“They know the players, they know the market, and they know what they’re doing,” she said.

The SGS-IGT partnership in the last 10 years has developed an excellent reputation for delivering consistent, strong game performance in the Georgia COAM market, dating back to the introduction of the prodiGi Vu cabinet in 2015 and continuing with the Cobalt cabinet today.

The Price is Right game set on the IGT Cobalt 27 cabinet has achieved unprecedented success in Georgia COAM, continually performing more than twice the market average since its launch in 2021. IGT also reports a significant performance increase on linked Fort Knox game sets compared to standalone units. When players see multiple cabinets with larger available awards that grow faster when linked, “the result is genuine excitement,” IGT said. All three game sets are available as linked progressives, so players can always expect to find their favorite games.

Shortall said he’s excited about what’s next in Georgia.

“We’re well-positioned to grow, innovate and reach new heights together,” he said, “thanks to the great relationships that Angela enjoys with so many people at IGT.”

Those relationships include partnerships with several other supporting companies, including M3T, which supplies a redemption kiosk that allows players to redeem for a replay ticket or gift card themselves without the help of an attendant, and JCM Global, one of the top bill validators in the world. Whitman also announced a new partnership with Advantage Plus, a financing company to help customers purchase the kiosks.

“SGS was first to provide IGT financing to Georgia operators, allowing for better cash flow management and, in turn, the machines pay for themselves,” Whitman said. “Following that lead, it made sense to provide a financing solution for M3T kiosk purchases to assist operators in their investment as they upgrade their routes to redeem for gift cards by July 2026. Advantage Plus is a great solution and I’m happy to bring them on board.”

Whitman’s 20 years of industry experience is well-rounded – she began her career working with Hunter running Midtown Vending as an operator.

“I was able to learn the industry through an operator’s lens origi-

nally,” she said, which helps her understand the needs of the operators who are her customers today.

A 20-year career doesn’t just happen without challenges and obstacles along the way, but Whitman’s has shown a great deal of fortitude.

“Angela’s ability to adapt, innovate and thrive in a constantly changing landscape is a testament to her passion and resilience,” said Jared Hale, IGT’s director of product. “Her vision, expertise and leadership have set a great precedent for excellence in the field. Angela has consistently led by example, shaping the industry and inspiring those within it while leaving a lasting impact in Georgia COAM.”

“We’re here for the long-haul,” Whitman said. “We have proven our stability.”

She emphasized that SGS is committed to continuing its “superior technical support, customer service and driving revenue with top performing products.”

Whitman and SGS will have a huge presence at the Expo in August marking her dual milestones and launching a major new IGT product (see Page 2 for the Peak Curve49 unveiling). She wants everyone to stop by the SGS booth to help them celebrate.

“I’m proud of what we’ve accomplished and looking forward to the future,” she said. “We’re going to celebrate at the show.”



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- Georgia Local Ordinances
- How to Strengthen Your State Association
- Grow Profits Through Process Automation, Artificial Intelligence and Dashboarding
- Gaming Update for Amusement Operators

Wednesday, August 20 - FEC TRACT

- Getting the Most Out of Your Cranes, Crane Rooms, and Redemption Counters
- Boost your FEC Social Game
- Digital Jukebox Tech Session with AMI & TouchTunes

Thursday, August 21 - PRESENTATIONS

- Georgia Lottery
- Intralot

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Omega marks seven years



Photo courtesy of Christine Kaiser

OMEGA GAMES earlier this month celebrated its seventh year in the COAM business with an open house at its facility in Norcross. Omega founder JR Hajiani, third from left, said the event was “wonderful” with many customers and friends stopping by. “It was

sort of an extravaganza,” he said. Mikaela Ciotola, director of sales and operations, is at Hajiani’s right. Other staffers at the open house are Sana, far left, and Nitesh, Shoeb and Navroz on the right.

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Expo

from Page 1

include an extra education day to allow for seminars geared specifically toward Class A operators. Kaiser said organizers want to attract more FEC (Family Entertainment Center) folks and other amusement operators to the Expo and hope the three seminars on Wednesday afternoon will do so.

Several other seminars for Class B operators, suppliers and other interested people are planned for Tuesday afternoon. In addition, a presentation by the Georgia Lottery Corp.’s COAM Division and Intralot takes place Thursday afternoon to close the Expo.

The Expo itself runs Wednesday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Thursday 10:30 to 2. The Expo allows attendees to see the latest in technology and offers operators and others a chance to compare products side-by-side, talk to manufacturers, and actually play the newest games available.

Some booth space was still available at press time, but not much. About 55 of the 60 or so booths have been reserved.

“We’re going to sell out again,” she said. “If you want to exhibit, contact me quickly.”

The Expo footprint is expanding again this year and will occupy both halls C and D in the Gas South Convention Center. The need to find additional space seems to be an annual occurrence, Kaiser said.

“The interest in the Expo is phenomenal,” she said. “It’s a good problem to have. This will be our largest show ever.”

The Expo will feature several new exhibitors this year, and attendees can expect to find some exhibitors debuting new products at the show. In addition, Kaiser said, some will be offering special pricing during the show.

The event will also feature a live auction, a reception, the GAMOA Awards Banquet, and a charity casino night on Wednesday at the Westin. The casino night, sponsored by Skyline Unlimited and Novomatic this year, will again benefit Bert’s Big Adventures, a non-profit organization that sends chronically and terminally ill children and their families to Disney World for a “magical” five-day vacation, all expenses paid.

“We hope everyone stays after the banquet to play, have fun, and support a great cause,” Kaiser said.

The GAMOA Awards Banquet will feature presentations of several awards: the Coin Operator of the Year Award, the Lifetime Achievement Award, and the Cutting Edge Award, which honors the developer of a top new product or service for



2025 SOUTHERN AMUSEMENT & ENTERTAINMENT EXPO

Tuesday, Aug. 19 – Skill Gaming seminar agenda

1:00 pm – 2:00 pm	Georgia Local Ordinances Speaker Les Schneider	GSD Magnolia BC
1:00 pm – 2:00 pm	How to Strengthen Your State Association Moderated by AMOA Past President Sam Westgate	GSD Magnolia A
2:15 pm – 3:15 pm	Grow Profits Through Process Automation, Artificial Intelligence and Dashboarding Mark Shivers & Tom Flemming, Ignite IPA	GSD Magnolia BC
3:30 pm - 5:00 pm	Gaming Legislative Update Featuring Paul T. Jenson	GSD Magnolia BC
5:00 pm – 7:00 pm	Sponsor/Exhibitor Appreciation Seminar Attendees Welcome	Westin Amethyst Ballroom

Wednesday, Aug. 20 – FEC seminar agenda

10:00 am – 5:00 pm	Expo Open	GSD Hall CD
1:00 pm – 2:00 pm	Getting the Most Out of Your Cranes, Crane Rooms & Redemption Counters Jimmy Chapman, Seasons Games – a division of LAI Games	Sycamore
2:15 pm – 3:15 pm	Boost your FECs Social Game Taylor McGlamery, Trustworkz	Sycamore
3:30 pm - 5:00 pm	Digital Jukebox Tech Session with AMI Entertainment & TouchTunes	Sycamore

Wednesday, Aug. 20 – General agenda

10:00 am – 5:00 pm	Expo Open	GSD Hall A&B
5:00 pm – 6:00 pm	Reception	Westin Jasper Foyer
6:00 pm – 8:00 pm	GAMOA Awards Banquet	Westin Jasper Ballroom
8:00 pm – 9:00 pm	Live Auction Everyone Welcome	Westin Jasper Ballroom
9:00 pm – 11:59 pm	Ginger Foshee Casino Night Benefiting Bert's Big Adventure Everyone Welcome Silent Auction ends	Westin Jasper Ballroom

Thursday, Aug. 21 – General agenda

10:30 am – 2:00 pm	Expo Open	GSD Hall A&B
2:00 pm – 3:30 pm	COAM Seminar GA Lottery COAM Division & Intralot	GSD Magnolia A&B





light of the Expo, will benefit GAMOA and its mission to promote and serve the state’s COAM industry.

Another fundraiser this year, which will replace the traditional raffle, involves a game called Dyn-O-Mite, hosted by Jimmie “JJ” Walker, the well-known comedian and star of the 1970s sitcom “Good Times.” Players can win anything from t-shirts to trips. Walker has appeared at past Expos in the Lock-dogs exhibition booth.

Special pricing is available for lodging for those who act quickly. Rooms have been reserved at the new Westin Atlanta Gwinnett that adjoins the Gas South Convention Center and the Embassy Suites by Hilton – \$199 for the Embassy Suites and \$209 for the Westin per night, plus taxes. The deadline to get a blocked room and preferred rate is July 28.

GAMOA is again hosting the event with the North Carolina Coin Operators Association.

Attendees and vendors throughout the Southeast can register online for the Expo at www.sae-expo.com. Prices increase at the door. For more information, contact Kaiser at (770) 284-6593 or christina@sae-expo.com to register.

“We invite everyone to join us and see why so many others have chosen the SAE as their place to connect with the amusement and entertainment industry in the South,” Kaiser said.

the Georgia COAM market. In addition, Goldfinger will present the Marshall Hartmann Technician of the Year Award at the dinner. The application for this award can be found at www.sae-expo.com. Manufacturers interested in vying for the Cutting Edge Award can con-

tact Kaiser. Following dinner will be the traditional live auction featuring donations from GAMOA's biggest sponsors and managed by spirited auctioneer and manufacturer Jonathon Culverhouse. Proceeds from the auction, always a high-



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Retail Matters

Panel talks ‘power of beverages’

By Renee Covino
Convenience Store News
Building a strong dispensed beverage program doesn't mean offering only the hot, cold and frozen options that have always been popular. Some of the latest successes in the beverage world have proven to be a surprise, panelists shared during Convenience Store News' 2025 Convenience Foodservice Exchange event.

During "The Power of Beverages: A Force Multiplier for Foodservice" panel, Dave Grimes, vice president of foodservice at Martin and Bayley Inc./Huck's, which has more than 130 locations across Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, Kentucky and Tennessee, described some recent "ah-ha" moments with flavors at the soda fountain. Currently performing well are several "zero" soda options, such as Coke Zero, Dr Pepper Zero and MTN Dew Zero, as well as some exotic flavor



shots like Raspberry Hibiscus, Mango Tango and Orange Ginger. "I was the most skeptical guy, but it's working," Grimes shared. "On the coffee side, everybody has a Colombian and a House Blend, but we brought in Blueberry and it's one of our best sellers." He added that the Blueberry brew is often enhanced with a vanilla creamer. "And the smell of that, give it a whirl." As a Gen Xer, Jeff Hagans, category manager for Greenville, S.C.-based The Spinx Co., which operates more than 90 convenience

stores across North and South Carolina, admitted that "I drink more sodas than I should." He's been surprised by exotic trends and how the younger generations of customers in particular are gravitating toward flavors, fizzy drinks and enhanced waters. "This is where we're really missing the boat in c-stores, not getting ahead of the next generation in fountains," Hagans said. "I don't think where we are today is going to play well 10 years from now." He also observed that frozen dispensed beverages are seeing "something of a comeback," adding that Spinx is leveraging this segment for limited-time opportunities and dessert promotions. Product naming can be used to make beverages stand out from competitors, Grimes noted. All of Huck's dispensed beverages have

names like Bigg Swigg, Bigg Chill and its "newest baby," Bigg Swirl. These names even lead to social media excitement, especially when "we send the Bigg Swigg guy to new store openings" and pictures are taken and posted, he explained.

More insights shared
Other insights shared by the retailers included:

- Redesigning cups and making color changes can equal a lift in fountain sales.
- Fresh Blends frozen drinks and smoothies are a hit.
- Iced coffee is gaining in popularity.
- There is good vendor funding for promotions, especially in coffee.
- Mascots, like Huck's Lucky the dog, are great for social media beverage buzz.
- Mystery flavors generate thrills in the beverage space.
- Chewy ice is more popular than chunky/cubed ice right now.

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2.33X LEADER in the Route Operations Performance Report - EILERS-FANTINI 1Q25

Top Performing New Game Sets, Emerging Vendors

RANK	GAME SET	SUPPLIER	UNITS	PERFORMANCE*
1	Legend Skill	Aristocrat	1,172	3.02
2	Georgia Game Chest	Light & Wonder	821	2.83
3	Hollywood	Bad Dog Games	970	2.33

Top Performing New Game Sets, Large Vendors[†]

1	Fort Knox 3 Link	IGT	6	3.04
2	Fort Knox 3	IGT	789	1.28
3	Fort Knox 2 Link	IGT	19	1.15

*Multiples of market average

[†]Only games above market average

BAD DOG GAMES

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Retail Matters

Improve your customer engagement

Panel provides strategies for small c-stores

By Danielle Romano
Convenience Store News

Independents and small operators make up the majority of the U.S. convenience store count. This uniquely positions these players to use local to their advantage, creating a customer experience that gets guests to return time and time again.

At the 2025 Convenience Store News Outstanding Independents Summit, thought leaders from across the c-store industry shared effective customer engagement strategies as part of a panel discussion. The participants included Tom Newbould, vice president of business transformation at W. Capra; Babir Sultan, president and CEO of Fav Trip; and Heather Webb, director of operations for Patron Points.

Customer engagement, according to Webb, has become synonymous with customer experience. She views customer engagement from the perspective of academic and business consultant Clayton Christensen, who is credited with developing the theory of "disruptive innovation."

"Really think about what the job is the customer is doing when they come into your location and how can you provide the best experience," she said. "They have so many choices, not just convenience stores, but other channels. So, getting them to come back again and again isn't just about products, but the value you bring to them. Pick your adjective — faster, easier, better — and how you're providing that to the customer."

With there being so many avenues a small operator can take to engage its customers — social media, mobile apps, SMS, signage in-store, signage at the pump — determining the best way starts with "getting the house in order first," according to Sultan.

"The in-person experience has

to be key," he emphasized. "From the greeting to the signoff, understand how your customers are being treated, how they maneuver around your store. What are they seeing and experiencing? Once the in-person experience is taken care of, then we start investing in the online experiences and loyalty."

All the panelists agreed that small operators should ask their customers how they'd like to be engaged with. Is it on Facebook or Instagram? Is it through a loyalty program? It all depends on what

critical to understand what type of program would actually work for your business and your community.

For Fav Trip, the most effective tool has been its text club, which now has more than 17,000 subscribers. As part of the program, the retailer sends a weekly text every Thursday for the past seven years without missing a single week. Each message shares how much of a discount customers will get on Friday.

This has become a tradition and a VIP experience — customers

now expect it and some even gamify the experience, guessing the discount amount online, according to Sultan, who shared that in-store and fuel sales double every Friday as a result of the anticipation created on Thursday.

Webb recommends small operators lean into their vendor partner relationships, too.

"A lot of (small operators) think they have to do this alone, that they have to self-fund everything. But your vendor partners want to be a part of your loyalty program. They succeed when you succeed," she explained. "So, reach out to them, ask them for help funding some of the programs that you want to run, but also just with ideas on what works outside of your store and what's working in other locations."

Another important area is training and incentivizing employees. "They are your No. 1 asset in your store. If they're excited [about an offer], the customer is going to be excited about it," she said. "If they know what's on special, they're going to tell the customer what's on special or what's happening."

Focusing on the data

Where small operators have a leg up on some of the larger c-store players is their ability to look at everything holistically across their entire network. Smaller retailers who get to know their customers can customize their sets, ensuring they have the right mix of products and leveraging data to know what's driving customers into the store.

"When you're up against one of the big players, you know they're looking at things at a much higher level. [Small] operators have the ability to really drill down to the lowest level denominator and really make a difference to their customer base and drive those customers in by personalizing that offer to that particular community," Newbould said.

Knowing what it is your customers want comes down to knowing your data. According to Newbould, scan data will help small operators understand what their best-selling products are, while related sales points can pinpoint what promotions are working.

Webb added that data from vendor and loyalty partners can help small operators determine information such as dollars per transaction and basket size — particularly the basket size of loyalty members vs. nonloyalty guests.

"Are you really driving those loyalty customers to return more often and purchase more within your store?" she posed.

For Fav Trip, its stores are viewed as a "playground" for testing innovative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, bringing "scan data to the next level," according to Sultan.

Areas where the retailer leverages this tech include:

Real-time inventory management: Audio AI detects stock issues based on employee input (i.e., noting out-of-stock items) and alerts managers, allowing for immediate reordering and vendor communication.

Heat mapping for sales optimization: Video AI provides heat maps to identify high-traffic areas, helping guide product placement and giving the retailer leverage in vendor negotiations.

Improved staffing efficiency: AI helped reduce employee absentee instances from 1,600-plus in December to under 700 by March by analyzing staffing patterns and peak times.

Enhanced loss prevention: AI flags returning individuals of interest (i.e., repeat shoplifters), allowing staff to respond more effectively and prevent theft.



your clientele looks like and who your target customer is.

For Fav Trip, the operator of five convenience stores in Missouri, social media has turned into an opportunity to engage and have fun online with customers. The chain is one of few convenience and fuel retailers that has a YouTube plaque for 100,000-plus subscribers, and has about 46,000 followers on TikTok. Fav Trip uses these online platforms to share deals, release behind-the-scenes videos and converse with customers to find out what products they're trying and what they're excited about.

"Nineteen million views a month is quite a bit for a small operator here [in the Midwest]. Absolutely, that's impressive, and you're creating a personality around the brand, too," Sultan said.

Loyalty Dos & Don'ts

Loyalty programs are becoming more accessible to c-store retailers of all sizes and so, they're becoming more widespread in the channel. But the panelists cautioned that before investing time, energy and money into any new technology, especially as a small operator, it is

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"What's driving that growth is the unique value RMNs offer: first-party data from retailers, which allows for more precise targeting, and the ability to tie ads directly to in-store or online sales," Wiener explained. "It's a rare case where both retailers and advertisers are seeing real, measurable upside."

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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.

Keep COAMs connected

To ensure accurate reporting of financial data to the Central Accounting System, the Georgia Lottery Corporation (GLC) says it is imperative the Location License Holders (LLHs) ensure all equipment remains connected to the site controller and powered up at all times.

The GLC maintains a record of those LLHs that are repeat offenders of failing to ensure the continuous connectivity and operation of Class B COAMs.

Failure to comply with these procedures may result in fines up to \$50,000, suspension and/or revocation of the license.

COIN OPERATED AMUSEMENT MACHINE LOCATION SWEEP AND MASTER PUSH CALENDAR			
COAM JULY-DEC 2025 COAM			
ACCOUNTING WEEK START	ACCOUNTING WEEK END	LOCATION SWEEP DATE	MASTER PUSH DATE
29-Jun-25	05-Jul-25	09-Jul-25	15-Jul-25
06-Jul-25	12-Jul-25	16-Jul-25	22-Jul-25
13-Jul-25	19-Jul-25	23-Jul-25	29-Jul-25
20-Jul-25	26-Jul-25	30-Jul-25	05-Aug-25
27-Jul-25	02-Aug-25	06-Aug-25	12-Aug-25
03-Aug-25	09-Aug-25	13-Aug-25	19-Aug-25
10-Aug-25	16-Aug-25	20-Aug-25	26-Aug-25
17-Aug-25	23-Aug-25	27-Aug-25	03-Sep-25*
24-Aug-25	30-Aug-25	03-Sep-25	09-Sep-25
31-Aug-25	06-Sep-25	10-Sep-25	16-Sep-25
07-Sep-25	13-Sep-25	17-Sep-25	23-Sep-25
14-Sep-25	20-Sep-25	24-Sep-25	30-Sep-25
21-Sep-25	27-Sep-25	01-Oct-25	07-Oct-25
28-Sep-25	04-Oct-25	08-Oct-25	15-Oct-25*
05-Oct-25	11-Oct-25	15-Oct-25	21-Oct-25
12-Oct-25	18-Oct-25	22-Oct-25	28-Oct-25
19-Oct-25	25-Oct-25	29-Oct-25	04-Nov-25
26-Oct-25	01-Nov-25	05-Nov-25	12-Nov-25*
02-Nov-25	08-Nov-25	12-Nov-25	18-Nov-25
09-Nov-25	15-Nov-25	19-Nov-25	25-Nov-25
16-Nov-25	22-Nov-25	26-Nov-25	03-Dec-25*
23-Nov-25	29-Nov-25	03-Dec-25	09-Dec-25
30-Nov-25	06-Dec-25	10-Dec-25	16-Dec-25
07-Dec-25	13-Dec-25	17-Dec-25	23-Dec-25
14-Dec-25	20-Dec-25	24-Dec-25	31-Dec-25*
21-Dec-25	27-Dec-25	31-Dec-25	07-Jan-26*

*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

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