2023 PROS TO KNOW AWARDS page 12

# Automatic MERCHANDISER





### **INDIVIDUALS**



MAC BOLAK Founder Panoptyc



CIPRIAN BUCSA President US Products



DAWN
HALSTEAD
Manager of Account
Ambassadors
365 Retail Markets



KEN
JOYNER
Founder
Innovative
Vending



JEFF PINC VP of Customer Operations 365 Retail Markets



NATE YARBOROUGH North American Support Team Lead Nayax LLC

#### **TEAMS**



#### **PANOPTYC**

Team members: Lisa Emanuel, Shane Wise, Bridger Keally, Mac Bolak and Ross Winston (not pictured)





#### **TECH 2 SUCCESS**

Team members: Darryl Perkins, Morgan Frazier, Chuck Brower, Brian Butrym and John Hickey

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VEMBER 2023



## **Operation Profile**



# Homegrown Success

Kansas City-based Quality Vending keeps family and community at the heart of its third-generation success.



**On the cover:** (From left to right): Carl Miceli, Sam Hagan, Dominic Miceli, and Dean Prather with Quality Vending

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#### **Features**



#### OCS Update:

# How operators are dealing with the new normal in the OCS business

In 2022, there was a growing sense of optimism about the coming year, as operators were sure that office populations would at least be back to 70%, but that big increase has not yet materialized.



#### The 2023 Pros to Know Awards

Honoring individuals and teams for their achievements in promoting industry innovation and future growth.





#### Cashless payment systems

As demand for cashless payment grows, operators have multiple hardware and software options.



#### Beyond hydration: Top 3 consumer beverage trends

Today's consumers are wanting functional beverages that have added benefits, looking for options in dairy alternative beverages, and showing a growing interest for mocktails in micro markets.



# Al in convenience services

From more engaging smart vending machines to machine learning for tracking inventory and buying patterns, artificial intelligence offers a range of advanced technology solutions for operators.

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  news and events
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What's happening in the industry on social media





# **ONLINE EXCLUSIVES**

Visit vendingmarketwatch.com for more on hot topics in vending, micro markets and office coffee service

### **Interviews, Expert Insight & Tips**

**OCS Operator** 

### How to generate sales leads at a higher level



Bob Tullio

**DUE TO EXISTING MARKET CONDITIONS, THIS IS A** great time for operators to take their sales leads to a higher level. Tullio shares his proven strategies for operators to consider as they search for that elusive state of sales lead utopia.

VendingMarketWatch.com/53072636

# Webinar | State of the Office Coffee Service Industry

Register to watch the on-demand webcast, State of the OCS Industry, that discussed data from Automatic



Merchandiser's State of the Coffee Service Industry Report, continued recovery for the industry, and some clear trends that are emerging in OCS products and equipment.

VendingMarketWatch.com/53071228

#### Podcast | How Sandy Schoenthaler has paved the way for others in the vending and micro market industry

In this episode of Vending & OCS Nation, Sandy Schoenthaler talks about her journey,



her efforts to move women forward in the industry and her many ideas that are helping operators succeed, especially in the micro market business.

VendingMarketWatch.com/53072609

#### **Micro Market**

#### Sodexo partners with SavorEat to debut Robot Chef for plant-based meals



SavorEat, a food tech company, partners with Sodexo to bring SavorEat's Robot Chef to the U.S. SavorEat employs Robot Chef to produce plant-based burgers for dining halls at the University of Colorado and the University of Denver.

VendingMarketWatch.com/53072694

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# **Nayax**

















# **Complete Open Payment Solution**







Management Suite



Integrated POS



Consumer Engagement









Cashless Acceptance



Dynamic Routing/ Inventory



Management



Remote Monitoring



In-Store



Increase revenue



Instant Refunds



Telemetry / IoT



Reporting Reconciliation



Data Collection



Reduce operational expenses



# Technology is key



Molly Rogers
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#### IN THIS ISSUE OF AUTOMATIC MERCHANDISER, WE ARE

honored to present the 10th annual Pros to Know Awards, which celebrate the achievements of leaders in the vending, micro market and office coffee service industry. The 2023 individual and team winners have persevered through today's challenging business environment to elevate workplace refreshments and embrace new technology.

This issue also spotlights companies that are leading the industry in technological solutions for vending and micro market operators. On page 22, read an overview of hardware and software options for cashless payment systems.

And on page 30, we've highlighted several advanced technology companies providing artificial intelligence solutions. These innovations are only scratching the surface of how AI will continue to advance the convenience services industry.

In this issue's operation profile, Kansas City-based Quality Vending shares how the family-owned and -operated business contributes its success to hard work, innovation and commitment to its customers. "We laugh when we think back at our beginnings," said company president Carl Miceli. "We had a couple of shelves of product wedged next to Mom's washer and dryer in a two-car garage. But it has been a family affair ever since."

This issue also covers three top consumer beverage trends on page 26 – functional beverages, dairy alternatives and mocktails in micro markets – to consider offering customers these beverage options that go beyond hydration.

As we approach the end of the year, we would like to thank everyone in advance for entering a product or nominating a colleague for our awards programs. The nomination period for Automatic Merchandiser's 2024 Legends of the Year Awards as well as Automatic Merchandiser's 2024 Readers' Choice New Products of the Year will both close in early January. The Legends of the Year winners will be recognized in our February/March 2024 issue.

Once all entries are received for our Readers' Choice New Products of the Year Awards, which recognize products and equipment for vending, micro market and office coffee service that were introduced in 2023, we will announce voting details in January at VendingMarketWatch.com. Operators will have a chance to cast a vote for their favorite products, and the winners will be featured in our April 2024 issue.

Lastly, if you would like to submit an article for publication consideration, we welcome articles from industry subject-matter experts. It can be an operator success story or a case study you'd like to share with our readers.

Thank you for reading, and I hope you have a wonderful holiday season!

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Jeff Deitchler Prairie Fire Coffee

Tim McAra Continental Services



# COME TO CTW BOOTH#306







# DISCOVER WHATS NEW!

Espresso Accessories Bamboo Racks Parts Filters

# WE MAKE CUSTOM INSTALL KITS!

Your project, our expertise let's bring it to life.





# TOP NEWS

# Elite Cuisine sponsors golf tournament fundraiser for local nonprofit

[ COMMUNITY ]



Elite Cuisine's chef Blake Hammond at the recent golf tournament

#### THE ST. LOUIS YOUTH HOCKEY FOUNDATION - A

nonprofit that provides support to young players – recently held its second annual golf tournament at Greenbriar Hills Country Club in Kirkwood, Missouri, and raised \$52,000. All proceeds will go toward assisting young players who need financial assistance.

Elite Cuisine, an Apex Restaurant and Market Solutions Inc. company, was a presenting sponsor for the golf tournament and provided the event's food. Elite Cuisine is a full-service provider that offers catering, micro markets, in-office cafes and coffee, and vending services for its corporate clients. Apex is a large independently owned corporate foodservice company based in Missouri with offices in St. Louis and Kansas City.

"The cost for each hockey player can reach \$25,000 per year," St. Louis Youth Hockey Foundation board member and Elite Cuisine founder Jim Schweppe, said in the announcement. "No parent should be forced to tell their child they can't afford to compete at the level of their accomplishment because of financial shortfalls."

Schweppe added that it is the nonprofit's goal to make hockey affordable and accessible to all youth. In exchange for these scholarships, youth recipients pay it forward through volunteerism and community service.

#### AVS Companies announces Waseem Salamah as key account manager



AVS Companies announced that Waseem Salamah will be joining the team as key account manager in the Elk Grove Village, Illinois, office. Salamah

previously worked for Rogers Vending as the VP of micro markets. He has extensive knowledge in the micro market, OCS and vending industries and will be a great resource to customers of AVS Companies.

VendingMarketWatch.com/53074194

# Five Star Food Service acquires Southern Vending

Five Star Food Service announced the acquisition of the Canteen franchise, Southern Vending Inc., a full-line vending and micro market operator in southwest Tennessee – expanding Five Star's presence in this region. Brian and Lorri Blattler founded Adamsville-based Southern Vending in 2000 and have since steadily grown its presence as a breaktime solutions provider for southwest Tennessee's largest employers.

VendingMarketWatch.com/53071233

# Aramark names Sasha Day as president and CEO of Aramark Destinations



In her new role, Sasha Day will lead Aramark's operations in National Parks, cultural landmarks, hotels and conference

centers across the country. Bruce Fears, who joined Aramark in 1974 and most recently served as president and CEO of Aramark Destinations, announced his retirement effective in December. VendingMarketWatch.com/53075074



#### The J. M. Smucker Co. to acquire Hostess Brands

The J. M. Smucker Co. announced the signing of a definitive agreement to acquire Hostess Brands Inc. for approximately \$5.6 billion. The acquisition expands the J. M. Smucker Co.'s offering of brands in the categories of coffee, peanut butter, frozen handheld and fruit spreads. VendingMarketWatch.com/53071842

#### **Compass Group North** America appoints new CEO

Palmer Brown, group chief financial officer, will succeed Gary Green upon retirement, as president and CEO

of Compass Group North America, effective December. Brown joined the U.S. business 22 years ago and has worked in North America in a variety of senior finance, strategy and legal roles. He has been responsible for many strategic acquisitions and disposals for Compass Group. VendingMarketWatch.com/53073252

#### **Due North enters into** exclusive agreement with G&J

Due North entered into an exclusive agreement with G&J Marketing and Sales, a leading vending sales broker, to represent Due North's retail refrigeration merchandisers to the micro market industry across the U.S. Due North is a leading North American manufacturer of self-contained retail refrigerated merchandisers through its Minus Forty and QBD brands.

VendingMarketWatch.com/53071169

#### Hershey names chief technology officer



The Hershey Company announced Deepak Bhatia as its first chief technology officer. Bhatia will lead the company's global

technology strategy, architecting and deploying digital capabilities that meet the needs of Hershey's consumers, retail partners and employees. Formerly the vice president of supply chain optimization technologies at Amazon, Bhatia brings expertise in developing automated systems, supply chain planning, optimization and simulation, Al and predictive analytics.

VendingMarketWatch.com/53073003

# Keep Your Cool



# FreshiQ health lock

- Universal fit for any cooler/freezer brand
- · Easy Install as retrofit or by OEM
- Certified by NAMA & FDA Food Code
- Compliant with health department
- Consumer guard by auto locking

# Fresh*Traq* remote management

- Real time alerts
- Analyze & diagnose equipment
- Reduce service cost
- Prevent product loss
- · Maintain freshest quality





# How operators are dealing with the new normal in the OCS business

In 2022, there was a growing sense of optimism about the coming year, as operators were sure that office populations would at least be back to 70%, but that big increase has not yet materialized.

By Bob Tullio, Contributing Editor

#### IT WAS A POPULAR POST-PANDEMIC LINE AMONG

convenience services operators at the 2022 Coffee, Tea and Water Show: "70% will be the new normal when it comes to office population." Most operators would be thrilled by that number today. The good news: CNBC reported in September, "90% of companies say they'll return to the office by the end of 2024 – but the 5-day commute is 'dead,' experts say. The debate over whether to return to the office is far from settled – and yet, the push to get employees back to the office is getting more aggressive." Who knows

what the 90% return to the office will really look like.

In the meantime, just as they have over the past three years, OCS operators are doing their best to survive and be profitable. They have shown remarkable resilience and flexibility and will need to maintain that mindset while they wait to see if something resembling what CNBC is predicting will come to fruition.

Operators have shared during Automatic Merchandiser's webinars and in Automatic Merchandiser's Vending & OCS Nation podcasts how they are dealing with the new normal in the OCS business, with the office population at about 50% of where it once was.

#### **RETOOLING**

Like many operators, Dan Welch of World Cup Coffee in Portland has tried several things to keep his company strong. "Everybody had to come up with an idea to pay rent. We tried to bolster our online sales and that really didn't work



because we were probably six months behind with that idea," he said. "People were already established, and we were just somebody new trying to enter the market, and it wasn't our bread and butter. We tried C stores and that helped out, but that wasn't really our bread and butter either, and C stores are notoriously poor payers, but it was good while it lasted."

Ultimately, Welch took the direction that many OCS operators have chosen. "We retooled ourselves to build up our pantry business, and that has helped out because it really took off," Welch said. "We're also getting better at micro markets. We're learning fast because we're still a small company, and we're taking trips to the NAMA Show, reading all the articles and listening to the podcast to learn from industry experts, because we don't want to make too many mistakes." Welch added that 365 Retail Markets and Panoptyc have been very supportive.

#### **SERVICE CHALLENGES**

C.J. Recher of Five Star Food Service said his company is dealing with plenty of new service challenges caused by the fluctuating office populations but believes the key to success comes from communication and expectation setting. "I think that's the biggest key or one of the biggest keys these days with clients – making sure that you understand what they expect of you and then also what they can expect in return from us as operators," Recher said. "Since 2019, we've got a lot of requests that would never have come before in terms of service, and we have a 'yes' mindset first, so we try to figure it out. If it's a net benefit on both sides, we'll make it work," he added.

Recher strongly believes that operators need to be in specialty coffee, creating that breakroom experience. "We've seen ourselves trying to work our way out of being a commodity. Creating that moment in the breakroom for your clients, employees or their guests is really what we're trying to sell," he said. "A lot of these folks are asking us 'How can you replicate or make it better than it was when they were working at home?" Recher added that if an office is trying to get people to come back to the office, operators need to create a much better experience in the breakroom. "If you know the coffee you are serving isn't on par with the expectations of the employees or the clients, then you're probably going to end up losing out at the end of the day."

#### **NEW THINKING REQUIRED**

Associated Services in the San Francisco Bay area is another iconic OCS operation that felt the lingering negative impact of the pandemic and continues to face challenges related to the workplace population. "We've had to make a lot of changes, post pandemic," said Tom Stueber, president. "The problem we have now is that our customers are still adapting to the hybrid work schedule." For Associated Services, that can make service a guessing game, since some clients aren't exactly sure who will be in the office and when.

Kimberley Lentz, director of sales and procurement for Associated Services, said the company is often called upon to go above and beyond, adapting to sudden upsurges in employee count and a need for special service. It's just part of the new normal, and as Lentz points out, "We are here to support our customers, and we can use the incremental jump in sales, which makes it worthwhile."

Like so many operators, Stueber is not taking any possibility off the table. With a large amount of tech accounts, his company has done well in the pantry service business, but he is starting to see more budget consciousness in that sector, which could require a move into micro markets. "There is starting to be more of a call for things that might not be free – not provided by the employer for free, but maybe provided on a subsidized basis, so we're looking for opportunities in that area," he said. "We'd like to grow back to where we were before, but it's going to take some new thinking to get there."



#### About the author

VendingMarketWatch.com contributing editor and industry consultant Bob Tullio is a content specialist who advises operators in the convenience services industry on how to build a successful business from the ground up and advises suppliers on how to successfully connect with operators. Tullio's YouTube channel,

b2b Perspective, is designed to "elevate your business in two minutes." Visit www.tulliob2b.com or email bob@tulliob2b.com.

# 

Honoring individuals and teams for their achievements in promoting industry innovation and future growth.

By Molly Rogers, Managing Editor

his year marked the 10th time that readers nominated individuals and teams whose accomplishments are moving the industry forward, and this esteemed award recognizes and celebrates their achievements. Congratulations to the 2023 Automatic Merchandiser Pros to Know Award winners who have helped their companies excel in the vending, micro market and office coffee service industry. The following individuals and teams have persevered through today's challenging business environment to elevate workplace refreshments and embrace new technology to promote future growth of the industry.

#### **DAVID ASHFORTH**

Founder and CEO
Digital Media Vending International LLC
David Ashforth, a visionary entrepreneur
and the driving force behind Digital

and the driving force behind Digital Media Vending International (DMVI), boasts over 21 years of industry-leading

expertise. As the CEO and founder of DMVI for 14 years, he has successfully co-owned and steered a pioneering custom vending machine design and manufacturing enterprise. DMVI is renowned for its innovative approach, consistently delivering intelligent and efficient product dispensing solutions across diverse industries, encompassing electronics, baked goods and nontraditional products. Ashforth's unwavering commitment to excellence is evident throughout the company's operations. Leveraging his wealth of experience, he provides invaluable guidance to clients at every stage of their journey, from initial design concepts to meticulous research, precision manufacturing and prototyping. With Ashforth at the helm, DMVI is poised to continue shaping the future of vending solutions worldwide.

#### **LARRY ATNIP**

President – Premier Sales & Marketing Vice President – Atnip Co.

Larry Atnip is second generation with Atnip Co. and a founding partner with Premier Sales & Marketing. Starting in the convenience services industry over



40 years ago, Atnip has had the fortunate opportunity to grow with this business and be involved in the many changes as a sales agent for many fine products. He prides himself being involved in developing innovation, pioneering new trends and looking for new products to increase operators' sales. Sales and marketing are at the core of the industry, and Atnip is often asked, "What do you have that is new?" Fortunately, Atnip and his team always have something new to talk about. "Making friends across this country from my experiences being on the NAMA board gave me a broader understanding of the impact each of our team members at Atnip/Premier make with our operators and distributors," Atnip said. "I am truly proud of the relationships we all have in building a better future for the convenience services industry."

#### **DAVID BARRIENTOS**

#### Regional Sales Manager Flowers Bakeries

David Barrientos is Flowers Bakeries' regional sales manager for the North. Since 2019, he has played a pivotal role in bridging the gap between sales and



production in support of his vending industry customers. With decades of experience in the food and beverage industry and extensive product knowledge, Barrientos is able to think outside the box to help operators and distributors grow their business.

#### **MAC BOLAK**

#### Founder **Panoptyc**

Mac Bolak has been starting companies in the artificial intelligence space since he was a teenager, including a venture



capital-backed company that used AI to edit basketball footage autonomously for basketball coaches. In 2019, he founded Panoptyc, the micro market industry's leading theft detection and security company. In 2022, Panoptyc was a recipient of Automatic Merchandiser's Readers' Choice Products of the Year Awards in the technology category. Panoptyc works with industry leaders and is in over 6,000 micro markets across the U.S., Canada and Europe. Panoptyc uses cutting-edge Al software and smart cameras to decrease theft in micro markets and save operators time reviewing footage. As a young and determined visionary, Bolak knows the industry inside-out and is continuously looking to improve Panoptyc's services while also exploring new opportunities within the industry.

#### **CIPRIAN BUCSA** President **US Products**

Ciprian Bucsa has more than a decade of experience accumulated in the supply chain industry. Over the years, he has been highly



skilled in identifying new clients, retaining his existing customer base and driving revenue growth. Bucsa excels in providing coffee solutions to customers in a way that best fits their budget and taste pallets. He is currently the president of US Products, a division of AVS Companies that focuses on providing a unique variety of consumable products to its customers. As a believer that extraordinary results are achieved by ordinary people working as a unit, Bucsa is the pro that you need to know when it comes to coffee and consumable goods in your business.

#### KATIE COCKLIN

#### **Chief Operations Chunk Nibbles**

Katie Cocklin is responsible for multiple facets of the growth that Chunk Nibbles has experienced in the past few years. She handles the operations of its self-



manufacturing capabilities supply chain while advancing marketing efforts in both digital and physical form. Being newer to this industry has not held her back. Cocklin has a vision of where the company can go and works tirelessly to achieve the results the company has targeted as a business. She has a keen eye for design and understanding what customers are looking for in the micro market and vending industry. Resilient, diligent and dependable are some of the best terms to describe this hardworking woman. She is a 2012 graduate from Michigan State University.

#### **TONY DANNA**

#### VP/General Manager, Cantaloupe Go Micro Market Division Cantaloupe

Tony Danna is the vice president and general manager of the Cantaloupe Go micro market division (formerly Three



Square Market). Prior to Cantaloupe, he started at Three Square Market in 2016 and spent five years building the business in the U.K. and Europe. Danna was promoted to president in January 2022, and led Three Square Market through its acquisition by Cantaloupe in December 2022. He is also a past recipient of Automatic Merchandiser's Pros to Know Awards in his previous position as director of international sales and was a recipient of Automatic Merchandiser's 40 Under 40 Awards.

#### **THOMAS DENARDO**

#### National Service Manager **Everest**

Thomas Denardo has been instrumental in transforming the department into a proactive and results-driven team since joining the company. Through



his leadership, they have implemented new policies and procedures that have led to remarkable growth. Denardo's commitment to data-based decision-making and dedication to the department's success have influenced his team to make informed choices and provide dynamic solutions, resulting in a high customer retention rate. By establishing strategic partnerships with national service providers, his team has improved their reach and service, enabling them to become more customer-focused and efficient. Denardo's dedication to fostering a highperforming team and allowing continuous improvement opportunities has influenced excellence in Everest's service department, contributing to its overall success.

#### PROS TO KNOW INDIVIDUALS

#### **CATHY FEELEY**

#### Western Sales Manager CBI & Associates

Cathy Feeley has been in the industry for over 40 years, starting with Kraft Foodservice on the East coast and then moving to the West where she "retired"



with Kraft in 1993. After a five-year hiatus, she came back into the convenience services channel via the broker world. She has been with CBI & Associates since 2015. She currently serves on two NAMA committees and as an officer for Arizona and California's state council boards, which helps her keep her pulse on the refreshment services world. Feeley was honored to be voted by her Arizona peers last month as the AAMC Supplier of the Year. Her passion is selling coffee and healthy snacks and beverages. "I've been fortunate to have great mentors and industry peers that continue to help show me the way," she said.

"My hope is to be viewed as a resource to my customers, as an advocate for the companies I represent, as well as additional individuals and companies that will best help them succeed."

- Cathy Feeley, CBI & Associates

# Congratulations!



The Nayax family congratulates

#### Nate Yarborough

for being selected Automatic Merchandiser's 2023 Pros to Know





#### **KATE FLYNN**

#### Co-founder and CEO Sun & Swell

Kate Flynn is an entrepreneur passionate about creating a more sustainable future. She is the cofounder and CEO of Sun & Swell,



a women-owned Certified B Corp based in Santa Barbara, California, with a mission to eliminate single-use plastics from the packaged food industry and build a more circular food system. Flynn earned her MBA from Harvard and holds a B.A. in economics from University of California - Santa Barbara. Prior to launching Sun & Swell, she was a management consultant and CPA. She lives in Santa Barbara with her husband and co-founder, Bryan, two small children, and a labradoodle.

#### **DAWN HALSTEAD**

#### Manager of Account Ambassadors 365 Retail Markets

Dawn Halstead joined 365 Retail Markets in 2017 as an accounting clerk in the 365 finance department. When a position



opened on the account services team in 2020, she moved into an account ambassador role, helping support several enterprise customers working closely with the account managers. Halstead's exceptional organizational skills, willingness to assist others and ability to problem solve allowed her to easily transition into a supervisory role where she has helped to build the account ambassador team. With a passion for training and development, Halstead implemented and launched a new CRM platform, onboarding all members of the sales team. She continually seeks improvements to streamline processes and close any gaps that might impact customer success. Halstead was most recently promoted to manager of account ambassadors where she will continue to mentor and develop her team.

#### **SEAN GRUNDY**

#### Co-founder and CEO Bevi

Sean Grundy is the co-founder and CEO of Bevi, maker of the leading Smart Water Cooler that provides sparkling, flavored and enhanced



water on demand. Grundy and his two co-founders started Bevi in 2013 with the vision of making the beverage industry environmentally sustainable by eliminating the need for single-use bottles and cans. Since Bevi's inception, the company has helped thousands of organizations across North America save more than 400 million single-use plastic bottles collectively and has raised over \$160 million in venture capital to disrupt the bottled beverage industry. The company continued growing throughout the pandemic by expanding its customer base beyond offices to include hotels, schools and factories. Grundy holds an MBA from MIT and a B.A. in philosophy from Princeton University.



#### **OLCAY GULDOGAN**

#### Director of R&D Selfly Store

Olcay Guldogan, director of R&D at Selfly Store, is a distinguished professional with over 20 years of experience in technology industries.



Holding Master of Science and MBA degrees, Guldogan has an extensive background in pioneering emerging technologies like IoT, AI, cloud computing and mobile devices. Under his leadership of Selfly Store's R&D team, the company has developed award-winning solutions like the Selfly Store Model 3 series, an intelligent vending freezer. These cuttingedge solutions are currently used by over 100 clients across 21 European countries, revolutionizing self-service shopping by enhancing consumer and merchant experiences while minimizing waste. Guldogan's commitment to innovation continues to pave the way for future growth and adaptation in an ever-changing business climate.

#### **TERRY HERR**

#### Area Sales Manager PrairieFire Coffee Roasters

Terry Herr has been a sales leader for the past 20 years in the beverage industry. He has been a vice president of sales and



marketing and general sales manager, leading his team to success. Herr's passion is to develop his team members into industry leaders with dedication and hard work and the desire to never give up. His motto is: out-work the competition. "I have a great team of beverage experts that have played a critical role in our companies' success," Herr said. "We all have 24 hours in a day; how you choose to use 'your' 24 hours is what really counts. We can't do what we have always done and continue to be successful. We need to be innovators, think outside the box and find something new to present the 'wow' factor."

#### **NICHOLAS HIMBURG**

#### Director of New **Business Development** Five Star Food Service

Since entering the industry in early 2019, Nick Himburg has held roles within Five Star as a retail team



manager, customer service manager and currently serves as director of new business development in the Atlanta metro market. Himburg contributes his success to his operational and account management background as well as having many great mentors along the way. This experience has allowed him to bridge the gap between sales and operations to deliver new customers a service program that meets their needs and is operationally achievable. He prides himself on building new relationships and providing outside-the-box ideas to solve the pain points his clients face

#### **PAUL T. IHN**

#### Vice President of Product Strategy and Day-to-Day Operations Vendtech/Naturals2go

Since April 2022, Paul T. Ihn has been steering Vendtech/Naturals2go, a company renowned for fostering local vending



businesses since 1987, as the vice president of product strategy and day-to-day operations. He is the linchpin for all product strategy and operational matters, ensuring the company's offerings are both innovative and operationally sound. Previously, Ihn was the vice president of engineering and operations for the Wittern Group. He was a member of the company's executive council and spearheaded strategic deployment, advanced R&D activities, and the verification and validation of an array of vending products. Previously, Ihn was the vice president of engineering and operations for Chicago Metallic, and prior to that, Ihn served as engineering vice president of Crane Merchandising Systems (CMS). His role at CMS, which followed the acquisition of Automatic Products Inc. (APi) in 2006, saw him leading engineering functions across facilities in St. Paul, Minnesota, and Warminster, Pennsylvania. Ihn initially joined APi in 1996 as senior vice president of engineering.



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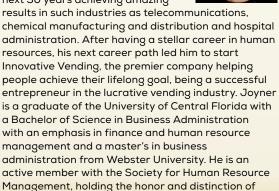
#### PROS TO KNOW INDIVIDUALS



#### **KEN JOYNER**

## Founder Innovative Vending

Ken Joyner, founder of Innovative Vending, started his career in human resources and spent the next 30 years achieving amazing



#### **BOBBY KEENAN**

### Sales Representative G & J Marketing and Sales

Bobby Keenan boasts an impressive 13-year career with G & J Marketing and Sales, primarily serving the Delaware, New Jersey and Massachusetts

Senior Certified Professional SHRM-SCP.



territories in the convenience services industry. His ability to forge lasting relationships have been instrumental in expanding the company's presence in these regions. Keenan's unwavering commitment to excellence and strong work ethic, coupled with his dedication to serving customers, supplier partners and distributors, are the driving forces behind his ongoing success.

#### **KATIE PILCHER**

#### Director of Sales Five Star Food Service

With over 20 years in customer relations and retail business development experience, Katie Pilcher joined Five Star's team in late 2020, during the



middle of a pandemic, in a new role as director of sales for a startup branch in Dothan, Alabama, which was a newly acquired territory for Five Star. A year later, her territory expanded to supporting five branches stretching over 300 miles in the Southeast. During this time, Pilcher focused on prospecting, fostering new relationships and growing the customer base and sales to over \$5 million in new business. With deep Southern roots and a passion to serve others, she strives to approach each client with the best hospitality and solutions for their ever-changing and sometimes challenging workforce. She does this with the support of her team, suppliers and her husband of 25 years, along with their four daughters, who continue to inspire and encourage her to keep the grit along with the grace.

Bobby Keenan's unwavering commitment to excellence and strong work ethic, coupled with his dedication to serving customers, supplier partners and distributors, are the driving forces behind his ongoing success.

#### **JEFF PINC**

#### VP of Customer Operations 365 Retail Markets

Jeff Pinc joined the 365 Retail Markets team in July 2022, but prior to that, he has been an active restaurant and foodservice



community member since the age of 15, from filling and frosting donuts to being a trained chef and co-owner of two restaurants. He has over 25 years of experience providing technology solutions to independent restaurants, stadiums and arenas and some of the largest global brands in the industry. Pinc has previously worked across organizations where his focus has been in SaaS software sales for restaurants and retailers to achieve operations excellence and food safety compliance. He attended Chaminade University of Honolulu and currently resides in Wisconsin.

#### **LAURA PRICE**

#### Director of Retail Operations Support Five Star Food Service

Laura Price joined Five Star nearly a decade ago serving as a reporting analyst, concentrating on the newly deployed micro market line of business



and helping develop and launch the company's business intelligence reporting software. With the rapid growth of micro markets and the company, she took on the additional role of managing a support team for both micro markets and vending at the corporate level. Price works closely with the VMS and market technology providers to keep Five Star's retail operational data accurate and up to date, as well as testing new features prior to release. Additionally, she manages the backend of Five Star's retail pricing program across micro markets and vending, working to ensure a fair retail price for the consumer while maintaining necessary margins to meet company expenses and revenue goals. Last year, Price was the recipient of Five Star's Extra Mile Award for her dedicated service.

# 365 Retail Markets is Proud to Recognize **Dawn Halstead and Jeff Pinc**

Pros To Know



**Dawn Halstead Manager of Account Ambassadors** 

Years at 365: 6

#### **Proudest Professional Accomplishment:**

"My most recent promotion to Manager of Account Ambassadors."

#### **Proudest Personal Accomplishment:**

"Taking 10 years off to be a stay at home mom and raising 2 beautiful children and being able to return to the workforce and climb the career ladder as a professional woman all while raising a family."

#### **Fun Fact:**

"I once deadlifted a 220-pound cement ball 40 reps at the Arnold Classic."



Jeff Pinc Vice President, Customer Operations

Years at 365: 1 Years in the Industry: 25

#### **Proudest Professional Accomplishment**

"Watching employees whom I have had the opportunity to mentor become successful leaders and the relationships and trust I've gained in the industry over the years."

#### Proudest Personal Accomplishment:

"Serving my country in the US Navy and raising two amazing children who are now amazing adults."

#### **Fun Fact:**

"I speak four languages decently and have had the opportunity to meet three American presidents."





#### PROS TO KNOW INDIVIDUALS

#### GILBERT RAMIREZ JR.

#### Marketing Manager Everest

Gilbert Ramirez Jr. strives to implement new strategies and achieve exceptional results. His knowledge of the ever-changing digital landscape has enabled him to execute



progressive marketing strategies that captivate the company's target audience across multiple platforms. By fostering a collaborative and empowering work environment, Ramirez has enabled marketing team members to thrive, resulting in enhanced productivity and exceptional campaign outcomes. His commitment to customer engagement and cross-departmental collaboration has led to remarkable growth in website traffic and contacts for Everest. His vision and work influenced Everest to expand into the convenience sector. Ramirez is always seeking customer feedback and leveraging their insights to refine marketing strategies and ensure satisfaction. With his expertise, creativity and dedication, he is continuously driving Everest's success and pushing the company to new heights.

#### **ROBERT ROUILLIER**

#### Founder VendingWhale

Robert Rouillier is a young visionary and founder of VendingWhale, a thriving vending machine enterprise headquartered in his hometown of Jacksonville, Florida. Rouillier's



entrepreneurial journey began when he made the bold decision to leave college prematurely to pursue his vending machine business dreams. In a short span of less than a year, Rouillier transformed his modest one-machine operation into a lucrative venture. His remarkable success can be attributed to his unwavering commitment to putting people first and fostering community growth. Rouillier's entrepreneurial spirit is matched only by his dedication to self-improvement. He is entirely self-taught in the art of running a business and further honed his skills through an apprenticeship with a respected local vending machine repair company. With over 75 machines under his belt and a bright vision for the future, Rouillier continues to be a dynamic force in the vending machine industry, all while championing community development and success.

#### **JOSEPH SCALA**

#### Micro Market Sales Project Manager Atlantic Culinary Environments

Joseph Scala is proud to be an integral part of Atlantic Culinary Environments Inc. With over 10 years of experience, his journey in the micro market industry has been defined by



dedication and hard work. He has had the privilege to witness and contribute to the remarkable growth and innovation in the micro market industry. Scala's passion for this field only continues to grow with time, and he takes pride in his role as a trusted advisor to its clients and strategic partners. "In the fast-paced industry, dedication and expertise are key," Scala said. "I am committed to pushing the boundaries and contributing to continued growth and innovations in the micro market sector." His family is a constant source of inspiration and motivation.

#### **JOSEPH SILVA**

#### Branch Manager Associated Services Company

Joseph Silva has over 30 years in the office coffee industry, which started with his role as office and operation manager for Coffee



Service Company and later, as part of the Associated Services Company family as office manager, purchasing, and for the past 17 years, as branch manager for the San Jose office. Customer service has always been his number-one priority. To achieve this, Silva feels that it requires a team. Over the years, he has worked to train, help and support his team and others within the organization to provide the best level of service to all its customers, which allows them to be a part of a successful team and company that he is proud to be a part of.

### GLENN WIGHT Director of Operation

#### Director of Operations Agora Refreshments

Glenn Wight joined Agora Refreshments as an operations manager in 2019 and assumed the role of director of operations



in 2022. Coming from an aerospace background, he set out to refine and improve processes at Agora. He navigated the difficulties of the pandemic and has been instrumental in the continued growth of Agora post-pandemic, eclipsing 2019 revenue numbers. Wight, along with his team, has helped grow Agora's service offerings, including the development of a robust pantry program that has increased snack revenue while maintaining high customer satisfaction. Over the past four years, Wight has overseen a full ERP implementation, directed two warehouse moves in both the Seattle and Portland markets, and helped position the Agora operations team for future success. Wight is a graduate of Western Washington University with a B.A. in Business Administration and a focus in operations management.

#### **NATE YARBOROUGH**

#### North American Support Team Lead Nayax LLC

Nate Yarborough began working at Nayax LLC in 2016 as a support agent. During his time in this role, he recognized the need for



more comprehensive training materials for new customers and took on this initiative to improve customer support. Yarborough's dedication to improving the quality and availability of support led to his selection as a support liaison for VIP customers. In 2022, he was promoted to support team lead, where he continued to build on his success by helping to establish an additional support center to provide increased coverage for all U.S. customers.

#### PROS TO KNOW TEAMS



#### **FIVE STAR FOOD SERVICE**

Team leaders: David Amberger, VP of purchasing and category management, Kimberly Boorse, senior category manager, Jessie Brown, category manager, Jay Harrold, purchasing manager, and Austen Bowles, associate category analyst

The Five Star Food Service purchasing and category management team works together with its supplier partners to maximize the company's sales and profits by satisfying customer needs. The team take a strategic approach in managing product category and product selection to achieve sales and profit targets. They accomplish this through: (1) Selecting the best product by working through supplier partners and category captains. (2) Optimizing pricing based upon market baskets, margin analysis and price elasticity. (3) Utilizing space management tools to ensure that products are ideally placed for optimal sales and margins through category and brand blocking in its planograms. (4) Creating a robust promotion calendar to drive consumers to its retail outlet and create excitement. (5) Gathering information from both internal data and category captains to gain insight into consumer behavior.



Kimberly Boorse handles the beverage and food categories, Jessie Brown handles the total snack category, Jay Harrold is focused on pricing and margin improvement, and Austen Bowles is focused on placement in space management software.

#### **PANOPTYC**

Team leaders: Mac Bolak, CEO, Ross Winston (not pictured), head of business development, Bridger Keally, VP of sales, Lisa Emanuel, general manager, and Shane Wise, SDR

With theft on the rise, micro market operators are having a harder time seeing their profit slip away, especially when other priorities take precedence. Trying to catch a thief is both time-consuming and difficult, with many operators still dealing with outdated camera systems and DVR swaps.

Panoptyc has changed the way theft detection and security solutions are implemented in the micro market industry. They provide a security camera system for operators that uses AI to identify and flag anomalies in



customer behavior that predict theft. Once those are identified, Panoptyc's team of investigators analyze the footage and compile a report detailing specific instances of suspected theft. Markets can have different tiers of service depending on the operator/client's needs. Panoptyc makes sense for operators as a cost-efficient solution to micro market loss prevention. All of these features provide operators with accurate and actionable cases so that they can forget about theft and get back to growing their business.

#### SMILE COMPOSTABLE SOLUTIONS

Team leaders: Frankie Schuster and Michael Sands. co-founders

Co-founders of Smile Compostable Solutions, Frankie Schuster and Michael Sands, are disrupting the single-use coffee pod industry with a commercially compostable option available for private label. The pair have bridged sustainability and convenience with Smile's fully certified compostable pod system and introduced a material that addresses all economic, capacity and performance concerns for the coffee category. Together, the partners are dedicated to building awareness and





education by speaking and volunteering at the local and national level on the damaging effects of single-use plastic, the importance of carbon reduction, and the need of end-of-life audits on all consumer packaging. Ten percent of their working hours are spent weekly working with the US Compost Council, US Plastic Pact, Biodegradable Products Institute, Compost Manufacturing Alliance, and other organizations trying to bring sustainability to consumer packaged goods.

#### **PROS TO KNOW TEAMS**



#### **TECH 2 SUCCESS**

Team leaders: John Hickey, Brian Butrym and Darryl Perkins
Team members: Morgan Frazier, Chuck Brower, Matt Godlove, Rebecca Tierney,
Marco Luperon, Jayce Martinez, Juan Jorquera, Jim Phelan, Alex Maureau and
Daniel Hickey

The Tech 2 Success team helps businesses improve their business by utilizing technology to automate and accelerate business processes. Tech 2 Success provides integrated OCS e-commerce sites, internet marketing, website design, cloud hosting, OptConnect connectivity for micro markets, custom dashboards, operations improvement consulting and IT consulting to vending, OCS and micro market operators and suppliers of all sizes. Located in Queens, New York, and throughout the U.S., the team helps operators increase sales via integrated OCS e-commerce and increase leads via internet marketing. The cloud team secures the data for thousands of users in operator companies every day. As an OptConnect wireless solutions certified partner, the Tech 2 Success team has helped make implementing new markets and connected equipment simple and secure for operators as they pioneer new services. Tech 2 Success was also awarded NAMA's 2021 Allied Member of the Year.





The Tech 2 Success team has helped make implementing new markets and connected equipment simple and secure for operators as they pioneer new services.



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#### **YO-KAI EXPRESS**

Team leader: Andy Lin, founder and CEO Team members: Amanda Tsung, COO, Kuo Hwa Chuang, CCO, Michael Yeh, U.S. general manager

The Yo-Kai team gives its best effort to support its customers. Meeting the expectations of its clients and consistently evolving with new technology are the keys to its success. Within the Yo-Kai team, Amanda Tsung coordinates with all clients, vendors and partners and oversees the internal operation. Kuo Hwa Chuang develops delicious meal and food research with partner restaurants and CPG companies, as well as designs different food and beverage product roadmap. Michael Yeh supervises all operations work in the U.S., including technical, logistic, machine installation and food allocation.

#### **HONORABLE MENTIONS**

- Aaron Hirt, AVI Foodsystems
- Burch Food Services Team
- Naturals2Go Team

## LEARN MORE ABOUT AUTOMATIC MERCHANDISER'S AWARD WINNERS

In Automatic Merchandiser's Vending & OCS Nation podcast, we spotlight some of our award winners to honor their achievements



in the vending, micro market and office coffee service industry. Be sure to listen and subscribe to Vending & OCS Nation in your favorite podcasting app so you don't miss an episode.





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available to operators, and this list looks at several providers, focusing on how their solutions can provide operators with a competitive advantage.

Evan Jarecki, co-founder and CEO of Gimme, a leading provider of VMS software and DEX hardware, works with every major cashless hardware provider. Jarecki said that the continued advancement of cashless payment systems is important to the vending and micro market industry. "For consumers, speed is key," he said. "The faster they can pay using whichever method is convenient to them – mobile, tap, card, cash – the better their customer experience."

#### **PAYMENT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

According to Bill Bartholic, vice president of enterprise sales, Cantaloupe offers a payment, engagement and optimization strategy for operators. "Credit and debit card readers that go on self-service machines and vending machines are our number-one piece, but we are growing all the time and bringing ideas to the industry," said Bartholic, who noted that Cantaloupe products are in about 1.15 million endpoints throughout North America, Europe and Latin America.

Bartholic added that from an engagement standpoint, Cantaloupe's systems can be set up to reward consumers and build lasting loyalty with tailored advertising and the MORE Loyalty program. "From an operations standpoint, Bartholic said that once the devices get deployed, "We actually then can use that data to deploy our software solutions to allow the operator to really scale their business up, and we have the teams behind us that allows it to happen."

#### **EMV COMPATIBILITY**

Lisa Appelson, marketing manager, North America, pointed to the Nayax VPOS Touch card reader as the centerpiece of its cashless payment systems program. "It is an EMV (smart debit and credit cards)-compatible device that is seamlessly integrated with telemetry, cashless clearance, monitoring, management and business intelligence (BI), allowing machines to be monitored in real time with updated information on all aspects of operation including inventory, cash monitoring, alerts and reports," said Appelson.

"While EMV has been a buzzword for years, there are still many machines integrated with devices that don't accept EMV tap transactions," Appelson explained. "These operators are losing 10-15% of potential revenue. And with swipe transactions slowly being phased out, an example being Apple cards being printed without the

magnetic strips, EMV compatibility is critical to ensure that operators are not losing money. Nayax has been at the forefront of this technology for nearly a decade, ensuring that Nayax operators are fully EMV compatible, with the ability to accept all payment transactions."

#### **COMPREHENSIVE WAYS TO PAY**

David Riddiford, president of Apriva, said his company's comprehensive payment solutions enable businesses to accept any way their customers want to pay, anywhere their business takes them.

"Our secure payment gateway processes a variety of cashless payments including credit and debit, mobile wallets, closed-loop payments such as campus, military and employee ID cards, and enables the acceptance of cutting-edge payment methods such as biometrics and QR code scans," said Riddiford.

Apriva works with self-service and vending operators in the U.S, Canada and Mexico.

"We recognize that every business is unique and deserves more than a one-size-fits-all solution," Riddiford said. "That



means we are free to seek out the best technology, provide you the best cashless solution for your business and help you get the best processing rates possible."

#### **CASHLESS PAYMENT TERMINALS**

Alan Munson, VP of business development, 365 Retail Markets, said the company's 365 cashless payment platform are customer-focused payment terminals that allow for cashless transactions with vending, micro market, dining and smart cooler points of sale. "These payment terminals feature interactive touchscreens, global wallets for a connected campus, and the ability to run on-screen promotions. Operators have to make sure they get every sale. Our cashless solution allows for a quick and appealing experience for the end customer when they are using a physical card, a refund code or their micro market account," added Munson, who noted that 365 Markets currently has hundreds of thousands of cashless terminals in all 50 states, transacting billions of dollars per year.

"We see our customers gaining a competitive advantage because they can offer their customers the ability to pay how they want through any of our points of sale. One of the many ways this is accomplished is by utilizing a connected campus. Our customers really take advantage of this when the location has multiple points of sale," he added.

#### **PAY BY MOBILE APP**

"PayRange is mobile first, but we also offer a full line of credit card readers and payment kiosks," said Matt Birchard of PayRange, who added that PayRange works with thousands of operators and serves millions of users. "Our primary product is mobile payment, and that's achieved through our BlueKey, which is a small, low-cost hardware device. Once that device is in the machine, users make payment using the PayRange mobile app, which connects to the machine via Bluetooth, and the mobile app allows users to add funds to their PayRange account using a variety of methods like credit and debit cards," said Birchard.

"In vending, it plugs and plays basically on MDB. There's no need for cellular or internet connection or expensive hardware, and this allows operators to reduce or avoid ongoing monthly connection fees," he added.

#### **TARGETED SOLUTIONS**

Some cashless payment systems are primarily geared toward a specific market, but the following providers are an ideal solution in many cases.

GrabScanGo serves offices and other locations, but it has also enjoyed a great deal of success in hotel micro market locations. "We provide pay terminals and a mobile app for self-checkout markets that support tap, dip and swipe of "

Operators have to make sure they get every sale. Our cashless solution allows for a quick and appealing experience for the end customer."

- Alan Munson, VP, business development, 365 Retail Markets

debit/credit cards, as well as Apple Pay and Google Pay from smartphones," said Wilf Martis, company co-founder.

Ashley Hubler, chief marketing officer of The Wittern Group, points out that its Greenlite cashless payment solution is a perfect fit for small- and medium-sized operators who are seeking an entry-level payment solution option and for operators who purchase equipment through its machine manufacturing division, USI.

"For the past decade, we have partnered with several of the industry's leading cashless payment solution providers, Cantaloupe and most recently 365 Retail Markets, to bring to market our proprietary cashless payment solution – Greenlight cashless – which allows our customers to access a wide range of modern payment options," said Hubler.

Microtronic Cashless Solutions' president Terri Starnes-Bryant has found success serving operators who need solutions specifically for the corrections industry. Because correctional facilities discourage cash and coin being brought in, Microtronic's card dispensers allow customers to purchase a loaded card and scan it on the vending machine card readers. "This is also a great solution for workplaces that want to easily provide incentives and gifts for their employees," she said.

#### **QUESTIONS TO ASK**

Gimme's Jarecki said that operators have a lot to consider when choosing a cashless payment provider. "For operators, accountability and efficiency are key," he said. "New cashless systems allow merchandisers to collect more reliable cash, cashless and inventory data with built-in bluetooth DEX capabilities. Plus, devices upgrading to 5G connections allow for more consistent remote DEX for improved forecasting – leading to better picks and labor savings through schedule adjustments."

Jarecki continued, "If I were an operator, the biggest value to me is high-speed connections and reliable uptime. I'd seek 5G LTE connections and ask for uptime/downtime percentages. Since re-installing new hardware on hundreds or thousands of points-of-sale is super time-consuming, I'd ask if they have any programs to help with mass installations to save my team's time and stay lean."



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# BEYOND HYDRATION:

# TOP 3 Consumer Beverage Trends

Today's consumers are wanting functional beverages that have added benefits, looking for options in dairy alternative beverages, and showing a growing interest for mocktails in micro markets.

By Adrienne Klein, Contributing Editor



functional beverages aim to hit on the increased consumer move toward better health and immunity. Not only do these enhanced beverages contain health-boosting elements like prebiotics and probiotics, they also can include vitamins and minerals and may come with reduced or zero sugar and all-natural ingredients.

Functional drinks are predicted to grab quite a bit of the consumer dollar in the coming years. In fact, in its 2023 "U.S. Functional Drinks Market Report," Research And Markets.com predicts that the U.S. functional drinks market will grow from \$45.32 billion in 2022 to \$71.84 billion by 2028.

And in its report, "Global Food and Drink Trends for 2023," Mintel predicted that, "Consumers will look for food and drink that influence cognitive capacity, manage stress levels and optimize brain function." They predicted that brands would be promoting the cognitive boosts available from ingredients such as fruits, vegetables and legumes.

Over the last several years, manufacturers have been launching products that tout such health benefits. Health-Ade Kombucha offers its kombucha in cans that read, "bubbly probiotic tea for a happy gut." Flavors include Pink Lady Apple, Ginger Lemon, Pomegranate and Passionfruit Tangerine. Not only are they offering a health-focused tea in several fruit varieties, but they also introduced a Glow Up variety pack that takes kombucha and combines it with added functional ingredients. For example, its Glow Up Kombucha Citrus Immune Boost has added vitamin C and zinc, while its Strawberry Glow comes with biotin and bamboo extract. The company even offers a functional soda alternative with prebiotics.



only company to do this. Remedy Organics, creators of plant-based wellness shakes, offers immunity

shots – 2-fl-oz bottles that tout health and wellbeing benefits. Its Energize Immunity+ Shot provides consumers with a burst of energy with its matcha, ginger and L-theanine, while its Protect line of immunity shots provide consumers with 150% daily value of vitamin C using ingredients that include elderberry, ginger and cayenne.

Earlier this year, SmartSoda entered into the ready-to-drink (RTD) category with the launch of its Brilliant Life Drink line, which starts with vitamin-infused alkaline water. Designed with zinc, turmeric, ginger, magnesium and elderberry, the SmartSoda Optimize Plus Immunity line purports to aid in building immunity. This line includes flavors of Yuzu-Currant Noir, Posh Gran-Limone and Pomelo Breeze.

The company's Quantum collection includes ingredients such as L-theanine, which reportedly provides natural energy, paired with ginseng, guayusa and guarana to help with focus.

Guru Energy offers several RTD sparkling water flavors; the one shown here is made with matcha and ginseng root extract and sweetened with monk fruit and stevia.



This move toward functional beverages is already permeating the vending, micro market and OCS industry. In fact, the NAMA Show 2023 People's Choice Awards winner in the coffee, tea and hot beverages category was Twinings North America Superblends Cold Water Infusions Immune Support. Caffeineand sugar-free, the Superblends Cold Water Infusions Immune Support provides consumers with 70% daily value of vitamin C per serving.

Consumers also chose a functional beverage as the runner-up in the 2023 Automatic Merchandiser Readers' Choice New Products of the Year Awards in the cold beverage category. Cult Botanical Infusions beverages are sugar-free, vegan and keto friendly. This follows the 2022 cold beverage winner Celsius Holdings Tropical Vibe, which boasts

> seven essential vitamins and zero sugar.

In addition to health benefits, consumers are also looking for beverages with enhancements that don't include sugar, and many companies are meeting this demand. Earlier this year, Monster Energy launched its original flavor with zero sugar. Meanwhile, Coca Cola's Vitaminwater also announced two new flavors



to its zero-sugar lineup, in addition to announcing that its sweetener formula would include monk fruit and stevia.

Vending, micro market and OCS operators have an opportunity to offer RTD beverages – from tea and coffee to kombucha and energy drinks – that provide customers with the health benefits and immune support they are looking for.

**DAIRY ALTERNATIVES** For the better part of 10 years, non-dairy milk sales have been growing consistently as consumers have sought to diversify their beverage consumption. Market intelligence agency Mintel reported on this trend nearly five years ago, revealing that non-dairy milk sales grew 61% from 2012 to 2018. And it appears this trend may be here to stay. Global technology research and advisory company Technavio recently published data that found the dairy alternatives market size is expected to grow by \$18.49 billion from 2022 to 2027.

In the vending, micro market and OCS channels, plenty of companies have been launching products to fit the consumer demand for dairy alternatives, from coffee creamers to RTD bottles. In 2019, La Colombe Coffee Roasters launched its Oatmilk Draft Latte in a 9-ounce RTD can. The

following year, Nestle and Starbucks announced Starbucks Non-Dairy Creamers, made with a blend of almondmilk and oatmilk. Even Greek yogurt maker Chobani got into the category in 2022 by launching several dairy-free coffee creamers.

Some manufacturers are even combining several trends into a one-stop-shop beverage for customers. Lucky Jack Coffee, for example, launched two new flavors of its RTD oatmilk lattes that come with superfood ingredients: Vanilla Collagen and Mocha Adaptogenic. The dairyfree Vanilla Collagen Latte offers consumers collagen and protein while the Mocha Adaptogenic Latte contains adaptogens like maca and ashwagandha that can reportedly help reduce stress, boost the immune system and improve mental clarity. These drinks not only give customers a dairy-free coffee beverage, but they also have those functional benefits consumers crave.

# MOCKTAILS IN MICRO MARKETS

One beverage trend that has been steadily gaining in popularity over the last several years is the consumption of non-alcoholic beverages. According to consumer intelligence company NielsenIQ, between August 2021 and August 2022, total dollar sales of non-alcoholic

drinks grew more than 20% to reach \$395 million.

This comes as more consumers are embracing a "sober curious" lifestyle in which they opt for alternatives to alcohol. Mintel found that nearly a quarter of U.S. consumers closely or occasionally follow a sober curious lifestyle. Mintel data also found that 52% of Americans believe restaurants should offer more mocktails, a non-alcoholic cocktail.

This is a trend that some beverage companies are already betting on. In 2022, Keurig Dr Pepper announced an agreement to acquire the global rights to the non-alcoholic, RTD cocktail brand Atypique. Several months later, the company also announced its investment in the non-alcoholic craft beer maker Athletic Brewing Company.

In addition, sparkling water company Spindrift launched four new flavors earlier this year, including the mocktail-inspired Nojito based on the mojito cocktail. The Nojito is Spindrift's first mocktail-style beverage.

Vending and micro market operators have an opportunity to benefit from this trend. With several RTD non-alcoholic spirits on the market, operators can embrace Dry January or Sober October by offering RTD mocktails. Using digital signage and promotions, operators can try introducing new mocktails during National Mocktail Week, celebrated the second full week of January. These are just a few ways how vending and micro market operators can capitalize on the popularity of mocktails - or non-alcoholic beverages in general especially in the right location.

Because beverage trends change through the years, there's no telling which ones will stick. But with so many products vying for the consumer dollar, it is worthwhile to try something new and offer a beverage that is beyond hydration.

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By Molly Rogers, Managing Editor

**ECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS IN ARTIFICIAL** intelligence are making vending machines more efficient and engaging to use. AI advancements can also help operators track inventory, optimize routes, track machine issues, prevent malfunctions and analyze buying patterns to determine the right products at the right location for the right customer. These are just a few examples of how AI companies are offering solutions to help operators in the convenience services industry, specifically for vending machines and micro markets.

In the 2023 NAMA Show educational session, Technologies Trending in Convenience Services, panelists discussed the impact of artificial intelligence in the convenience services industry. Paresh Patel, founder and CEO of PayRange, compared the sentiments of AI to when the internet was in its infancy. He said that every company is trying to integrate it into their products, and for the vending industry, it can be used in several ways, such as customer service support, merchandising and pre-kitting, which can all be beneficial to operators.

Carly Furman, CEO of Nayax, discussed how Nayax is using AI in card payment options, such as utilizing transaction data and offering value to customers through personalized loyalty programs. And, John Hickey,

co-founder and president of Tech 2 Success, which offers IT services such as cloud migrations and management, e-commerce solutions and vending technology solutions, explained how AI can be used for customer data sales retention or reducing defects in machines to operate more efficiently. He added that using a data analyst may be helpful in understanding what technology can do for specific needs.

#### **AI-POWERED VENDING MACHINES**

Hivery is a technology company that provides advanced systems for AI-powered vending machines. Hivery Enhance helps vending machine operators by applying machine learning to the data directly from a VMS. Hivery Enhance can also optimize planograms for each vending machine in a fleet. In 2018, Reyes Coca-Cola Bottling teamed up with Hivery for a pilot program with impressive results – 15% fewer restocking trips and 6% in additional revenues.

Harman Digital Transformation Solutions is another company that is taking AI even further by offering a voice-activated vending machine with conversational intelligence and advanced payment options. By combining conversational AI with digital kiosk technology, customers can use self-service solutions without touching the screen. Harman's eNOVA features Automatic Speech Recognition



(ASR), Natural Language Understanding (NLU), and highquality human speech synthesis. It can upsell offers for the user's persona and preferences, and the vending machine can be enhanced with proximity sensors for demography detection to determine customer persona. The experience is enriched with voice-enabled assistance in product search, selection, ordering and payment.

Swyft, a San Francisco-based global provider of smart robotic vending machines and a range of satellite retail solutions, offers robotics and software to reduce customer friction and eliminate shrink. Its technology leverages AI and machine learning to predict customer behavior. Swyft's smart vending technology harnesses the power of big data to feed its AI engine, providing an understanding of the consumer as well as operational efficiency. Each interaction can be tracked and analyzed, from the choice of products to the time spent interacting with the system. The data is fed into the Swyft Cloud, where its AI technology sifts through, classifying and analyzing patterns to generate insights. These insights guide businesses on selecting products, which can help enhance revenue and streamline operations. Its solutions also offer real-time inventory - in which recommendations can optimize inventory levels and efficiently manage inventory to minimize waste.

Invenda Group AG, a leader in next-generation automated retail, recently partnered with Quividi, a leader in AI and computer-vision-based platforms providing real-time audience measurement and shopper engagement for digital out-of-home and retail. The partnership delivers high-fidelity audience impressions to Invenda's entire network of vending machines. Invenda's Internet of Retail technology powers smart vending machines featuring screens of up to 49 inches that can be leveraged to drive incremental advertising revenues. The screen space is sold through programmatic platforms and partner media brokers.

#### AI IN UNATTENDED RETAIL

SandStar AI Retail Technology is another artificial intelligence company, which provides computer vision technology for the retail industry. Its solutions engage shoppers with grab-and-go convenience, autonomous checkout and data analytics. Founded in 2016 and headquartered in Charlotte, N.C., the company provides smart kiosks, computer vision smart shops and smart store analytics. SandStar's dynamic computer vision detects what is taken out of - or put back - into the kiosk and creates a shopping cart where the customer can quickly and easily confirm or correct their purchase. At NAMA 2023, SandStar unveiled a range of cutting-edge technologies, including QR code payment, age verification, and ChatVMS and ChatStore, as well as two new models, 21 Plus and Brew Buddy. SandStar's ChatVMS and ChatStore technologies, powered by natural language-based data analysis and recommendations, provide businesses with streamlined experiences, data-driven insights and automated operations.

#### **GENERATIVE AI TECHNOLOGY**

Generative AI, a type of advanced AI, along with other technologies like computer vision, object recognition, advanced sensors and deep machine learning models, are being used in Amazon's Just Walk Out unattended retail stores. Amazon research teams is using a type of generative AI called generative adversarial network (GAN) to create synthetic data for training Amazon's Just Walk Out technology. The team used datasets from millions of AI-generated synthetic images and video clips mimicking realistic shopping scenarios, including variations in store format, lighting conditions and crowds of shoppers. This training allowed Amazon to scale the original Just Walk Out technology to a system that can recognize millions of actions without making mistakes, so when a customer exits, there is an accurate account of their purchases.

These technological innovations will continue to advance convenience services - as this is only the beginning of AI's capabilities. ■





# Homegrown SUCCESS

Kansas City-based Quality Vending keeps family and community at the heart of its third-generation success.

By Aaron Jed, Contributor

HAT DOES QUALITY VENDING & COFFEE HAVE IN common with Google, Apple, Amazon and Walt Disney? Well, for starters, the Kansas City-based company's humble beginnings took root in the family garage. Fast forward 32 years and, like those corporate juggernauts, this familyowned and -operated company found success through hard work, innovation and an unwavering commitment to its customers.

"We laugh when we think back at our beginnings," said company president Carl Miceli. "We had a couple of shelves of product wedged next to Mom's washer and dryer in a two-car garage. But it has been a family affair ever since. Every member of our family - my parents, my brother-in-law, my siblings, our kids, and my sons-in-law - has had a hand in supporting our business."

#### IT STARTED IN THE GARAGE

In 1991, Don Miceli and his late wife JoBeth took what was an enormous leap of faith in launching their vending company from the family's modest suburban home. Drawing on his three decades of vending experience at the time, Don set his heart and mind to building a company based on a principle that, to this day, has stood the test of time: quality.

To prosper, Don knew that he had to differentiate his company from other vendors who were selling the same products, from the same vending machines. His strategy centered on the quality of service he could provide. "At the end of the day, we were all selling Snickers bars and Cokes, but to do that from a *quality* perspective - that was the way to build a business rooted in relationships and excellence," Don said.

To deliver on that, Don, along with his son Carl, went about investing their time, resources and whatever it took to be an industry service leader. "If a customer called with a request or a service need, we were on it: late nights, weekends, holidays," Don said. "We simply put their needs before our own and, honestly, we were happy to do it. We were more than a vending company - we were Quality Vending Company."

For Carl, working alongside his dad was an extension of what he already knew and loved. As a teen, he worked summer jobs in

vending, going to work with his dad and learning the ropes as a route driver, technician and warehouse worker. "It never was a question of 'if', but more 'when,' I would make vending my career," Carl said.

Not even a year into their new venture and with a growing list of accounts, Don reached out to his son-in-law, Dean Prather, about joining their team. With a degree in industrial management, Dean was a bit apprehensive about a career switch. "When my father-in-law called to say he had a spot for me at the company, I was excited about the potential, but nervous about an industry I knew little about, other than what I knew from his and Carl's experience over the years," Dean said. "But I did it! Hands down, it is one of the best life decisions I've ever made."

#### **ORGANIC GROWTH**

Quality Vending's homegrown success came by way of Don's careful and conservative approach to business. "My dad had a very intentional, no-nonsense approach to expansion and purchase of new equipment," Carl said. "We simply invested wisely. We never took a loan to buy a single vending machine. We paid for equipment and improvements as we went. We were organic in every sense of the word – building our business one account at a time."

Given the day, much of that organic growth also came by way of word-of-mouth referrals – happy customers who recommended Quality Vending to other businesses. In time, the vending operation



#### OPERATION PROFILE

# Quality Vending & Coffee Co.

Founded: 1991

**Headquarters:** Kansas City, Missouri **Website:** www.qualityvendingkc.com

Number of routes: 12 Number of employees: 27 Number of accounts: 500+

Number of coffee machines: 200+
Number of vending machines: 1,200+

Tech/equipment providers:

Streamware, LightSpeed, Tech 2 Success and VE Solutions

Distributors:

Vistar, Pepsi, Coca-Cola, Seven-Up, Kitchen Fresh Foods, The Roasterie and Hiland Dairy



Quality Vending continues to expand its company-branded Qmart Break Place micro markets.



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POTY 2024 submission | Company Name, no later than

January 5, 2024. If you have any questions, please call Molly Rogers, editor, at 205-409-0843.

Please note that all products considered for the award MUST have been launched in 2023.





had taken over more than the garage. "We were constantly replenishing our inventory," Carl said. "We were stacking product all over the place, just to keep up."

Five years in, the company moved to its first 5,000-square-foot warehouse. "We thought we had died and gone to heaven!" Dean laughed. "We had all the space in the world for managing our inventory. We could drive our trucks inside to load them. We had a spot for everything. It was a beautiful facility that we were so very proud to be in."

#### **SURE AND STEADY**

Like any business with three decades under its belt, Quality Vending has navigated the challenges of an everchanging world. Trends come and go. Technologies evolve. Pandemics can happen.

"There's a balance in determining how and when our company should also change to meet the needs of our customers, our industry, and our world," Dean said.

Carl recalls when selling bottled water in vending machines seemed like a radical idea. "I was like, 'Oh my gosh, people are really going to buy bottled water?" Carl questioned.



Carl Miceli and founders Don and JoBeth Miceli along with son-in-law Dean Prather outside their first dedicated warehouse.

Rather than impulsively jumping on the hottest trends, the company's approach has been to listen carefully to what its customers are asking for. When calls for office coffee service (OCS) started brewing, it added this service line. True to its sure-and-steady approach, what began with a simple one-pot setup, is now a robust line of coffee services, including single cup, espresso, and fresh ground and gourmet offerings.

Similarly, the company introduced cold food vending at the requests of its customers, which led to one of the largest segments of its business today.

"This service line proved to be an invaluable asset during the COVID-19 pandemic as many essential businesses relied on our offerings to keep their employees fed and hydrated," Dean said.

"If there is any facet of our industry in which we dragged our feet, it was the micro market segment," Dean said. "I'm not embarrassed to tell people that we were late adopters of the concept," adding that he and Carl were at a NAMA convention in Chicago many years ago when this new concept was introduced.

"We walked out of that show, looked at each other, and said, 'these people have lost their minds. It's just an honor box system!' We made a conscious decision to not invest in that segment – that we would let everyone have fun with it until it died." Dean said.

As it turned out, demand for the innovative convenience concept continued to blossom. "We had been sitting on the outskirts, paying attention to micro markets," Carl added. "We realized that the day was going to come when we would need to include them in our offerings. We just didn't realize it was going to come as quickly as it did."



Aaron Bowers, Quality Vending's warehouse manager.

The turning point came when one of Quality Vending's largest customers wanted to transition from traditional vending to micro markets. "We were very transparent that we were not a player in that space yet," Dean noted. "Ultimately, the customer decided that they didn't want to be our guinea pig, and we ended up parting ways."

Sam Hagan, Carl's son-in-law who serves as business development manager at the company, says it was not a lesson lost on them. With the loss of a major client to one of America's largest vending conglomerates, Quality Vending accepted that it was time to add micro markets to its service lines.

"Our industry is constantly evolving," Sam said. "So, we, as a company also need to evolve, whether we like it or not. It's a constant learning curve."

#### **GROWTH MINDSET AND A** THIRD GENERATION

Today, learning is a big part of Quality Vending and Coffee's gameplan. In addition to Sam who leads business development and marketing, Carl's son Dominic Miceli, and his son-in-law Jeremy "J.D." Warman, are part of the talented team - the third generation to help lead and grow the company.

Joining in 2010, J.D. supervises the route sales and service team for the company's 12 vending and coffee routes. Dominic, who joined in 2014, manages inventory and warehouserelated operations. Sam, who started in 2017, leads the company's business development and marketing. Don, who retired in 2010, remains a daily visitor - and an exemplary role mode - to the team who is carrying on his legacy.

In recent years, Quality Vending's 27 dedicated staff members have forged ahead, eyes wide open, to ensure a company that is ahead of the curve and leading the way in industry best practices and innovation.



Quality Vending's Khary Mosby pulling soda.

In 2020, the company moved to a 25,000-square-foot facility. The new site includes a full-on pre-kitting operation with LightSpeed technology. Its vending sales and OCS continue to expand as well as its company-branded Omart Break Place micro markets.

And, for the earlier mentioned customer who parted ways with Quality Vending? Having proven themselves more than capable of providing high-quality micro markets,



Quality Vending successfully earned that customer back, an accomplishment that serves as a huge source of company pride. "It's the largest project that I've been a part of to-date," Sam said. "We have grown so much since then, and it truly is a testament to who we are as a company and the level of service we strive to provide."

#### SAME STUFF, BUT BETTER

Dominic insists that there is nothing extraordinary about Quality Vending's product offerings. "We recognize that we aren't unique in the products that we offer, nor is our equipment much different than our competitors," Dominic said.

"We know, without a doubt, that proactive and uncompromising customer service adds value," Sam added. "That is 100% why we earned back that customer's vote of confidence." And, ensuring the customer has a positive experience is at the heart of that confidence.

Beyond exemplary service, technology is also a huge part of the experience. "We are not afraid of new technologies," Dean said. "We embrace it. We were early



Quality Vending's Al Christofano pulling snacks in the warehouse.



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adopters of credit card readers on machines, as well as universal management software. Every chance we get, we put technology to work." Quality Vending offers customers a mobile app to

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Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulat

seamlessly place and track service calls. In addition, in collaboration with IT solutions provider Tech 2 Success, the company built a comprehensive e-commerce site for order placement and tracking.

"It was a huge upgrade for us, because it provided courtesy emails to the customer that say, 'Hey, your order is being delivered in 48 hours.' It completely mitigated our hotshot deliveries," J.D. said. "We're providing that same service, but now it is more streamlined and relevant to our customers' needs."

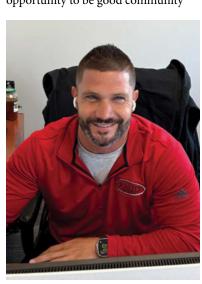
#### **KEEPING IT LOCAL**

Aside from America's top brands, Quality Vending and Coffee takes great pride in bringing hometown favorites to breakrooms across the metropolitan area. The lineup includes coffee from The Roasterie, Guy's Potato Chips, and a variety of fresh food and pastries from local purveyors. "We are really trying to put an emphasis on partnering with local companies

Quality Vending leaned heavily on its regional partnerships through COVID when supply chains were unpredictable. In those uncertain times, these relationships proved to be invaluable, allowing the company to continue meeting the needs of its customers while experiencing continuing growth and profitability.

heading into the future," Sam said.

"We very much appreciate the opportunity to be good community



Jeremy Warman, Quality Vending's route supervisor.

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PS Form 3526-R, July 2014



Melanie Lawrence, office manager.

partners," Dominic said. "I've been working alongside our family for a lot of years now, and I cannot think of a time that giving back has not been a part of our culture." Quality Vending enjoys supporting a variety

of customer initiatives and local nonprofits. Recently, it partnered with the national Giving Machines campaign sponsored by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints that allows patrons to donate to

humanitarian causes in the U.S. and around the globe.

#### ONWARD AND UPWARD

Carl and Dean affirm that the current and future success of Quality Vending is predicated on the company's culture, values and relevancy in the marketplace.

"Most multi-generational businesses fail," Carl said. "The ones that succeed take great care in instilling and maintaining a culture of excellence. My father, Don, taught us to keep our work ethic strong, and our commitment to our customers even stronger. Our foundational principle - quality above all - is a testament to who and what we are: Kansas City's own Quality Vending. ■

# Marketplace

Inquiries to Tami Morrell: Phone: 708-917-1786 Email: tmorrell@endeavorb2b.com



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Mike Ferguson - VMAC Solutions has over 32+ years' Vending & OCS industry experience, an ex-operator turned intermediary business broker. I speak fluent Vending and Office Coffee.



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Sargento Foods announced the appointments of three new leaders: Erin Price, senior vice president of marketing; Mohamed Attia, vice president of strategic sourcing; and Brent Mann, vice president of food safety and quality. bit.ly/3PKAfmr







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Nominations are now open for Automatic Merchandiser's second annual Legends of the Year Awards. Industry members can nominate themselves or someone else whose contribution to their company or organization deserves recognition.

To be considered for the award, nominees must have 25 years in the industry. Nominees from all industry segments are welcome: operators, product or equipment distributors, brokers, machine manufacturers, technology and payment system providers, and CPG companies, among others.

The Legends of the Year winners will be announced in the February/March 2024 issue of Automatic Merchandiser.



Deadline: January 9, 2024

Nominate today! bit.ly/2024Legends



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