

A Winning Lineup

2022 READERS' CHOICE New Products of the Year Awards page 14

Automatic MERCHANDISER

Convenience services for vending, micro markets and workplace beverages

Stick-to-itiveness *Pays off*

Giambra Vending
emerged smarter and
stronger after Hurricane
Michael and COVID.
page 32



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On the cover: The Giambra Vending family (from left to right): Thomas, Chuck, Josh, and Kaden.

Success Story

32 **Stick-to-itiveness pays off for Giambra Vending**



The one-two punch of Hurricane Michael followed by the COVID pandemic only strengthened the Florida operators' resolve to emerge smarter and stronger.

ONLINE EXCLUSIVES

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

Interviews, Expert Insight & Tips



OCS Operator

Safety: This critical OCS selling point should not be neglected by operators



Bob Tullio

QUALITY COFFEE, GREAT SERVICE AND A PRICE THAT makes sense – these have been the fundamental OCS selling point triggers since the very beginning of the OCS industry. Another trigger, driven by millennials and Gen Z, is sustainability. Now, as offices begin to repopulate, a new critical selling point needs to be added to the list – safety. Bob Tullio explains what safety means in today's OCS industry.

VendingMarketWatch.com/21260290

Coffee consumption hits two-decade high

According to exclusive consumer polling released by the National Coffee Association (NCA), 66% of Americans now drink coffee each day and Americans have increased coffee consumption away from home by 8% since January 2021.

VendingMarketWatch.com/21260922

Mondelēz names SnackFutures' 2022 Colab startups

Mondelēz International Inc. has named 10 mission-driven brands to participate in its latest SnackFutures Colab, an innovation and venture hub. Each startup in the CoLab class of 2022 receives a \$20,000 grant.

VendingMarketWatch.com/21258960

Special Report



Micro Market

Zippin launches checkout-free store at Houston's NRG Stadium



MICRO MARKET NEWS

A second Zippin-powered store opened in Houston's NRG Stadium, in partnership with Aramark. The Ice House Express locations offer an entirely checkout-free shopping experience for attendees.

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There's much on the horizon



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It's a crucial time for the industry – with everyone recovering from the pandemic and the advancements of new technologies.

WELCOME TO THE APRIL ISSUE OF AUTOMATIC MERCHANDISER

– and my first issue as managing editor. I joined the AM and VendingMarketWatch.com team March 1, and it's been an exciting transition from my former position with a group of Endeavor brands for the processing, instrumentation and industrial water industries. In the past month, I've been busy preparing for my first NAMA show, and I am looking forward to meeting so many of you at the event. It's a crucial time for the industry – with everyone recovering from the pandemic and the advancements of new technologies in unattended retail, vending and office coffee services, and so much on the horizon.

I took over this position from Nick Montano, but we are pleased to have him join our Editorial Advisory Board, so you will still see his name contributing to Automatic Merchandiser and VendingMarketWatch.com with upcoming feature articles.

This month, we've also been busy with opening several awards programs, and I can't wait to learn more about the nominees to come. First, we introduced our Most Influential Women in Convenience Services Awards, celebrating women in leadership positions. The deadline to nominate is April 28, so there may still be time for you to submit a nomination. We will reveal the winners in the next issue.

Second, we recently opened up the nomination period for our 40 Under 40 awards, which debuted last year. For this year's awards, the deadline to submit your nomination is July 1, and the winners will be featured in the September/October issue. You can learn more about one of the past winners in this issue's Operation Profile where we turn the spotlight on Giambra Vending and owner Josh Giambra. His Florida vending operation has persevered through a catastrophic hurricane as well as the pandemic, but today, the operator is seeing blue skies ahead with growth in micro markets, cashless payment and prekitting.

In this issue, you can also read about the 2022 winners and runners-up of our annual Readers' Choice New Products of the Year. Readers had a chance to cast their votes, and we've presented those results for 11 categories: Salted Snack, Healthy, Protein & Meat Snack, Cold Beverage, Equipment, Cookie & Pastry, Candy, Food, Technology, OCS Product, and OCS Equipment & Systems. Congratulations to the honorees.

It certainly is a busy time for this industry and the hardworking people in it. I look forward to working with all of you. Feel free to reach out to me.

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AWARDS
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TOP NEWS

Gimme to migrate exclusively to Google Cloud

[TECHNOLOGY]

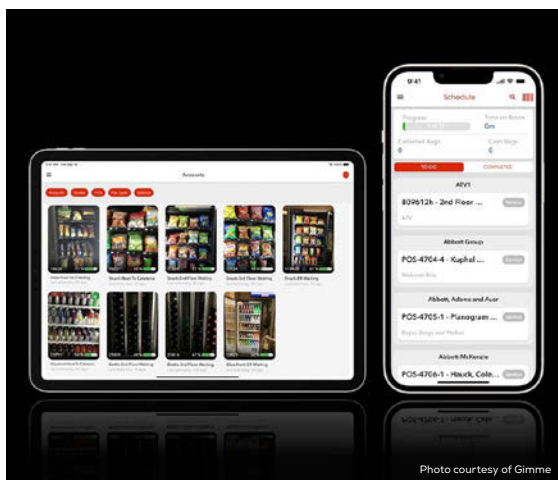


Photo courtesy of Gimme

GIMME ANNOUNCED THAT IT IS migrating exclusively to Google Cloud. The technology will be used in Gimme VMS, software designed to help warehouse staff and route drivers maintain accurate product inventories. Gimme will implement Google Cloud's BigQuery, AI Infrastructure and Kubernetes Engine to improve efficiencies and increase data handling.

- **BigQuery:** A serverless, highly scalable and cost-effective multi-cloud data warehouse, with built-in machine learning capabilities designed for business agility, will provide faster report loading and seamless integrations.
- **Managed DevOps:** For higher, long-term uptime and stability.
- **Google Kubernetes Engine:** Open-source container-orchestration system for automating computer application deployment, scaling and management.



Cantaloupe unveils bundled subscription model

Cantaloupe Inc. announced the launch of the Cantaloupe ONE Platform, a first-of-its-kind bundled subscription model. Cantaloupe ONE enables autonomous retailers to future-proof their business, eliminate capital expenditures on new hardware, and reduce the risk of hardware end-of-life, with zero upfront fees. The platform is available now and is gaining significant market traction. **VendingMarketWatch.com/21261654**



Parlevel continues growth in Latin America

Parlevel Systems announced its continuous expansion into the Latin American market through two major micro market projects in Mexico and Peru. Parlevel now has major vending and micro market customers in over 10 countries in Latin America. The new projects with customers in Mexico and Peru are a testament to Parlevel's technology scalability and adaptability to different geographies. Through Parlevel's Vending Management System (VMS) and micro market kiosks, unattended retail operators can use powerful tools to spend less, sell more and take control of their operation. **VendingMarketWatch.com/21261703**



Beyond Meat and PepsiCo to debut plant-based jerky

Beyond Meat Inc. and PepsiCo Inc. announced Beyond Meat Jerky. The convenient plant-based jerky is the first product from the two companies' joint venture, Planet Partnership, LLC. Beyond Meat Jerky is Beyond Meat's first shelf-stable product, unlocking new channels of distribution with availability everywhere from grocery stores to gas stations, and club stores to pharmacies. **VendingMarketWatch.com/21261937**



Selecta partners with Mars Wrigley for smart vending

Selecta Group announced a strategic partnership with Mars Wrigley. The companies will introduce a new generation of intelligent vending machines. The machines will feature 48-inch touchscreens to display products dynamically and interactively with consumers. Consumers can access detailed product and nutritional information on-screen, purchase multiple products in a single transaction and receive product suggestions. **VendingMarketWatch.com/21258571**



FreshBrew to sell vending division to Compass Group

The sale is a strategic move by FreshBrew to focus the company's efforts and resources on the expansion of its coffee, tea and extract product lines. FreshBrew has grown its vending division into a large, independent market leader in Texas. The vending division maintained a strong focus on technology and healthy initiatives, offering safe, convenient and efficient transactions, as well as customized offerings such as micro markets and smart cafes, setting the company apart from its competition. VendingMarketWatch.com/21262253

Capital Provisions acquires 3D Vending

Capital Provisions announced it has completed the acquisition of 3D Vending. The purchase marks the seventh completed by Capital Provisions over the past two years and the second to be operated out of its Palm Springs branch. The acquisition delivers a wide-ranging portfolio of vending and market accounts and broadens Capital Provisions' service area in the Temecula and Riverside regions. Beyond acquisitions, Capital Provisions is driven by extraordinary customer service, organic growth and operational efficiency in conjunction with its technology partner, Vagabond. VendingMarketWatch.com/21261384

CRANE

Crane Co. to separate into two companies

Crane Co. announced a plan to pursue a separation into two independent, publicly traded companies – Crane Co. and newly formed, Crane NXT. Crane Co. will include the Aerospace & Electronics and Process Flow Technologies businesses. The Payment and Merchandising Technologies (PMT) business will become Crane NXT and is expected to achieve approximately \$1.4 billion in sales with a pre-corporate adjusted EBITDA margin of approximately 28%. VendingMarketWatch.com/21262236

MORE ONLINE



Alkaline Water Company expands production

VendingMarketWatch.com/21262384

FinGo and VMC partner for new vending prototype

VendingMarketWatch.com/21261017

Westrock Coffee Company rebrands

VendingMarketWatch.com/21259797

Keurig Dr Pepper announces net positive water goals

VendingMarketWatch.com/21261476

PEOPLE IN THE NEWS



Carla Saunders retires from AVS Companies

Saunders is retiring from the amusement and gaming industries effective April 1. She has been with the company for 17 years.



Karla Schlieper is appointed president of Mondelēz Canada

Schlieper assumes the leadership role in Canada following her success leading the Mondelēz business in Latin America. Schlieper joined Mondelēz International in 2013.



Coca-Cola's board elects Mike Suco

Suco will serve as Birmingham, AL-based Coca-Cola Bottling Company United Inc.'s next president and chief executive, effective Aug. 1, 2022. Suco, whose career spans more than 26 years in the Coca-Cola system, is currently Coca-Cola United's senior vice president and chief commercial officer.



Sodexo taps David Gillan

Sodexo SA appointed Gillan to the role of chief of strategy and client retention for its Sodexo U.S. Healthcare unit. He previously served as group senior VP for Vizient.



Compass Group appoints Shelley Roberts to chief commercial officer

Roberts joined Compass in 2017. She will lead the group's global clients, strategies, M&As, health and safety, sustainability, digital and procurement functions.



NAMA appoints Nick Steingart as state director to government affairs team

Steingart comes to NAMA from the Associated Builders and Contractors where he managed ABC's state and local affairs. Steingart has experience in both political and official capacities at the state legislative level.



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Light at the end of the tunnel

Coffee operators weigh in on 2022 progress and trends.

By Bob Tullio, Contributing Editor

THE KASTLE SYSTEMS REPORT SPELLS IT OUT. THE RETURN TO THE office is slow, but facility managers tell me that the momentum is clearly pointing in the right direction. What does the sentiment look like among coffee service operators?

I caught up with some office coffee service leaders from coast to coast and asked them two questions: Is there light at the end of the tunnel? And what OCS trends are beginning to emerge based on conversations with clients?

Judson Kleinman

CORPORATE ESSENTIALS: 'CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM'

Judson Kleinman of Corporate Essentials in New York has been pivoting (there is that word again) like a point guard since February 2020. Now, he is looking for that open lane to the basket, with cautious optimism. "Spell it this way," said Kleinman. "Cautious optimism."

"I was always optimistic," he said. "I have to say this last bout of the pandemic took a lot out of many people, because there were so many instances where we thought that we were set to return to work. I think there's a little bit of reluctance, but I also think there's more optimism now that we're going to be out of this than there has been before."

Local roasted, fresh ideas are trending

On OCS trends, Kleinman pointed to local roasted coffee and fresh ideas. "All the people that we deal with,



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whether it's facility managers, HR, CEO, purchasing, they're all looking for interesting ideas to help encourage people back to the office. Being creative and looking for new ways to do things – is essential to keeping the accounts engaged with you," he said.

Arthur Siller

EVERGREEN REFRESHMENTS: 'NICE-TO-HAVE ITEM IS NOW MUST-HAVE ITEM'

Based in the Seattle area, Arthur Siller is upbeat about the direction of the local workforce population. "We have seen a large group of our locations return to work, which is excellent. Some are taking longer than we'd like but they still have return-to-work plans. Another trend we're seeing, particularly with a lot of our larger clients, is they're building new spaces

or buying new property and building out offices, which is obviously a very positive sign," he said.

Bean-to cup, sparkling water are trending

Siller observed that because employers want the breakroom and the coffee service area to be a destination, part of the reason to return to the office, he sees a trend toward the importance of broadening product offerings, a focus on bean to cup units and increasing demand for sparkling water. "What used to be a nice-to-have item, is now a must-have item," he said.

David Baker

PREMIER VEND GROUP: 'COFFEE IS STARTING TO COME BACK FOR US'

Southern California is a nice place to be in the OCS business, and David Baker is definitely optimistic about the immediate and long-term future.

"Companies out here are trying to incentivize their employees and get them back to the office. Coffee is coming back for us. Our sales are improving," said Baker.

Premium offerings are trending

"Prior to COVID, customers would ask us to cut costs, to give them coffee that is economical, but tastes great," Baker said. "Now, customers are coming to us saying, 'We want the newest, the best, the greatest, the most premium offerings you can provide to our staff right now because we want them back in the office.'"

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C.J. Recher

FIVE STAR FOOD SERVICE: 'MAYBE THAT LIGHT WILL START TO BE VISIBLE'

Covering a wide variety of market areas from the mid-Atlantic states to the Deep South, C.J. Recher has seen many clients "kick the can down the road for months when it comes to reopening their offices." He notes that at least no clients are going backwards, and many are just figuring out how to work through the situation.

"In terms of the facilities that are closed, there's some that we saw reopen in September and October, whether it was part-time or full-time, and then omicron hit, and they started peeling back," he said. "Hopefully, as we get closer to spring and in the warmer months, and if no worrisome variants emerge, maybe that light will start to be visible."

Differentiation is trending

"We still have plenty of businesses out there that are running your traditional drip brew OCS programs, but a lot of bean to cup, a lot of craft coffee, a lot of local roasters that we're partnering with. Everybody's trying to elevate their game and create some sort of differentiation for themselves. We're trying to help be that partner when and where we can. Obviously, it's got to make sense for the business to be able to do it, but we try not to say no," he said.

FINGERS ARE CROSSED

Several other operators I spoke to report the same thing:

- Increasing discussions about when the return to the office will occur – in whatever form.
- An interest by locations to elevate their game from an amenity standpoint.

Both developments are cause for optimism, but while every operator can see the light at the end of the

tunnel to some extent, all of them are hoping that omicron was the last difficult stop on this long COVID road. ■



About the author

Industry consultant and VendingMarketWatch.com contributing editor 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." For more info, visit www.tulliob2b.com or email bob@tulliob2b.com.

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A Winning Lineup

2022 READERS' CHOICE
NEW PRODUCTS
OF THE YEAR AWARDS

Products of the Year

READERS' CHOICE AWARDS 2022

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Automatic Merchandiser announces
this year's winners and honorees
in 11 product categories.

By Adrienne Klein, Contributing Editor

AS THE COUNTRY EMERGES FROM THE COVID-19 pandemic, many Americans are beginning to return to work in person. In the last two years, consumers have developed new habits and different food and flavor preferences. Manufacturers have continued to provide operators with equipment and products that will help them broaden their offerings, especially as companies look to operators to help incentivize employees back to the office.

This year, Automatic Merchandiser asked vending, micro market and OCS operators to vote for their most successful or most requested products and equipment that were introduced in 2021. This year's winners in 11 categories are consistent with market trends for bolder flavors, smarter technology and premium ingredients.

SALTED SNACK

Dot's Pretzels LLC took home the gold medal with the most votes in the Salted Snack category. The company expanded its line of pretzel twists with the new **Honey Mustard** variety. This is the third seasoning in the company's pretzel lineup, joining Dot's Original and Southwest flavors. The flavor was launched in June 2021 after hundreds of customers submitted requests via social media for a honey mustard seasoning. The company responded and began development of the new flavor in 2020. Dot's Honey Mustard pretzels are available for vending and micro markets in 1.5-oz. personal and 5-oz. bag sizes.

Following in a close second place is **Deep River Snacks' Zesty Lime kettle cooked chips** featuring a bold lime flavor. These chips contain no artificial flavors, colors or preservatives and are cooked only in sunflower oil.



Dot's Pretzels Honey Mustard

HEALTHY

For customers looking for a healthy grab-and-go solution, look no further than **Solely's** new **Dried Organic Mango Pieces** made with just one ingredient – the highest-quality, ripest and most delicious mangos. Solely Dried Mango Pieces are expertly dried and cut into small pieces and contain no added sugar, preservatives or sulfites. The company's patented drying process allows for each bite to taste as flavorful as a fresh ripe fruit. Solely's 1-oz. pouches are the perfect portion for individual snacking. Solely has also added a Facts Up Front calorie badge specifically to this SKU to remain fully compliant for all vending machines. The suggested retail price is \$1.79-\$1.99.

Musselman's Apple Sauce in cups and pouches from Knouse was the runner-up in the Healthy category.



Solely Dried Organic Mango Pieces

PROTEIN & MEAT SNACK

According to Food Insight's 2021 survey, "From 'Chemical-Sounding' to 'Clean': Consumer Perspectives on Food Ingredients," Americans are paying more attention to ingredient lists, selecting clean ingredients over chemical-sounding ingredients. In fact, nearly two-thirds (63%) of adults say the ingredients in a food or beverage have at least a moderate influence on what they buy. The winner in the Protein & Meat Snack category showcases these findings. **Righteous Felon craft jerky** is made with top-quality, hormone- and antibiotic-free beef sourced from Roseda, a celebrated Black Angus farm located in northern Maryland. Righteous Felon jerky is handmade and produced in small batches to ensure freshness, quality and consistency for the ultimate tasting experience.

Coming in second place is **Baja Jerky Street Taco** flavor.



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COLD BEVERAGE

In July 2021, **Celsius Holdings** launched its newest flavor, and the winner in AM's Cold Beverage category, **Tropical Vibe**. A combination of starfruit and pineapple, Tropical Vibe provides essential energy, has zero sugar, no preservatives, no artificial colors or flavors and has seven essential vitamins. "We are thrilled to launch Tropical Vibe to our Celsius consumers," said John Fieldly, president and CEO of Celsius Holdings Inc., in a company announcement. "The extension of the Vibe line follows the tremendous success of our Peach Vibe launched in the summer of 2020 and is an on-trend addition we believe will not only expand our portfolio lineup but continue to appeal to a broader base of energy drink consumers seeking better-for-you functional energy."

RISE Brewing Co. Original Black Cold Brew Coffee Multi-Serve was the runner-up in the Cold Beverage category.



Celsius Holdings
Tropical Vibe

EQUIPMENT

In the Equipment category, **365 Retail Markets' PicoMarket** took home the gold. The 365 PicoMarket appeals to both small and large locations. It is the most compact, full-featured self-checkout kiosk on the market. This game-changing countertop innovation transforms breakrooms into snacking sanctuaries worldwide. The PicoMarket accepts all forms of payment, including swipe/tap/chip and 365Pay app and can enhance and streamline the checkout experience in any size micro market. It offers lower startup costs than traditional vending and has quick and easy self-installation with global support.

The runner-up in the Equipment category was **API Tech's Smart Pizza vending machine**.



365 Retail Markets
PicoMarket

COOKIE & PASTRY

In the Cookie & Pastry category, **McKee Foods** received the most votes for its reprise of **Little Debbie Star Crunch**, a chewy cookie topped with caramel and crispy rice, featuring a coating of fudge. The new individually wrapped cookie is 3-oz., shelf-stable and fresh date coded. They are sold in a 72-ct. case (six caddies/12 wraps per caddy). "Operators will find this new 3-oz.-sized product to be a perfect solution for vending machines, micro markets, cafeterias and catering," the company said in a statement.

Little Debbie parent McKee Foods introduced Little Debbie Vending in 2012 to address the sizes and packages to meet the needs of the convenience channel.

Prairie City Bakery's new Birthday Cake Ooey Goey Butter Cake came in second place.



McKee Foods
Little Debbie
Star Crunch

CANDY

Van Wyk Confections took home gold in the Candy category for its new flavor of **Sweet & Salty Pretzel Rods** launched in October 2021.

Crunchy Toffee Sweet & Salty Pretzel Rods were introduced after the successful rollout of the original Salted Caramel Sweet & Salty flavor. The 100-calorie pretzel rod is submerged in a creamy milk chocolate dip and covered with toffee bits. Each rod is individually wrapped and certified peanut-free. The company ships 36 rods per tub and six tubs per case (216 ct.).

AWAKE Caffeinated Bits from **Awake Chocolate** was the runner-up in the Candy category.



Van Wyk Confections
Sweet & Salty Pretzel Rods

This year's winners are consistent with market trends for **bolder flavors, smarter technology** and **premium ingredients**.

Thank you for voting us

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PRODUCT OF 2022!

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READERS' CHOICE AWARDS
2022

Automatic
MERCHANDISER
Vending

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FOOD

This year's winner of the coveted Food category goes to **White Castle's Chicken and Cheese Slider**. Available in vending and micro markets, the top-selling non-beef slider in White Castle restaurants joins five other White Castle varieties

that are available in grocers' freezers and foodservice: Original Sliders, Classic Cheese Sliders, Jalapeño Cheese Sliders, Chicken Breast Sliders and the Sausage, Egg and Cheese Breakfast Slider. The Chicken and Cheese Sliders are made with all white meat and topped with American cheese.

Taking second place is **J&J Snack Foods' Pretzel Fillers Buffalo Cheddar Stuffed Soft Pretzel made with Frank's RedHot**. The soft pretzel dough is stuffed with white cheddar cheese infused with Frank's RedHot hot sauce and lightly dusted with ranch dressing powder.



White Castle Chicken and Cheese Slider



TECHNOLOGY

Panoptyc, this year's winner in the Technology category, is a game-changer for micro market operators. Panoptyc leverages artificial intelligence through a software and hardware solution to recognize theft and alert the micro market operator of suspicious behavior. The average micro market that deploys Panoptyc's technology has gained 255% theft reduction, which translates to thousands of dollars a year, per market, back in the operator's pocket. The company says its goal is to reduce shrink for market operators, help them overcome customer theft, and save countless hours that employees spend watching footage.

Launched in May 2021, **ePort Engage** from **Cantaloupe Inc.** was the runner-up in the Technology category.



Panoptyc



OCS PRODUCT

Alliant Coffee Solutions' Authentic Donut Shop Drive Thru soft coffee pods garnered the most votes in the OCS Product category. Alliant Coffee Solutions' back-to-basics coffee line features a milder taste profile and no-frills packaging for larger work environments that want it at all:

specialty coffee quality, single-cup convenience and unbeatable value. Bulk cases eliminate the cost and hassle of smaller cartons for high-volume kitchens. Retail-style countertop dispenser boxes offer a convenient, space-saving way to give everyone easy access to great coffee. Donut Shop Drive Thru soft coffee pods are made from 100% specialty-grade Arabica coffee and offered in three flavor profiles: Breakfast Blend, Americano Dark and French Vanilla.

Compostable K-Cup Compatible Coffee Pods from **Smile Beverage Werks** took second place in the OCS Product category.



Alliant Coffee Solutions Authentic Donut Shop Drive Thru Soft Coffee Pods



OCS EQUIPMENT & SYSTEMS

Coffee consumption has soared to a two-decade high, according to findings from the National Coffee Association (NCA). The Spring 2022 National Coffee Data Trends (NCDT) report found that 66% of Americans now drink coffee each day. The report also found that Americans have increased coffee consumption away from home by 8% since January 2021. It's no surprise that **BUNN's Fast Cup** won the most votes in the OCS Equipment & Systems category. Fast Cup is a high-performance bean-to-cup system featuring an intuitive touchscreen experience and fresh-brewed coffee by the cup, hot or cold, in about 30 seconds. The Fast Cup produces practically no coffee waste, ensuring all beans are brewed into the cup. With three bean selections, a variety of cup sizes and options for hot and iced coffee, Fast Cup delivers versatility from a single platform.

Introduced in April 2021, the **Elkay Smartwell Touchless Countertop Beverage Dispenser** came in second place.



BUNN Fast Cup

Check out all of these products and more in the Product Guide at VendingMarketWatch.com/directory.



2023 Readers' Choice
New Products of
the Year awards

If you are launching a new vending, OCS, or micro market product in 2022 and would like to enter your product(s) for next year's awards, watch for our announcement in October on VendingMarketWatch.com for details on how to submit a product for the awards program. Once nominations are received, readers will have a chance to cast their vote.

Please note that all products considered for the award must have been launched in 2022.

Categories include: Salted Snack, Healthy, Protein or Meat Snack, Cold Beverage, Equipment, Cookie & Pastry, Candy, Food, Technology, OCS Products, and OCS Equipment and Systems

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CHICKEN & CHEESE SLIDERS

Products of the Year

READERS' CHOICE AWARDS 2022

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Understanding connectivity options for self-checkout and vending

Once an operator incorporates “smart” equipment,
having a reliable connectivity solution is vital.

By Brian Gill, OptConnect

WITH THE EVOLUTION OF THE Internet of Things, the number of devices that are created – and need connectivity to the internet to function – is skyrocketing. Operators have more options than ever before with internet-connected equipment to facilitate mobile payments, real-time analytics, remote monitoring, maintenance alerts, tracking transactions and so much more.

When the Internet of Things is without a reliable internet connection, the “thing” stops working, which can greatly affect an operator’s bottom line and leave customers frustrated. (The “thing” in this context, by the way, is an entity or physical object that has a unique identifier.)

Once an operator incorporates “smart” equipment, having a reliable connectivity solution is vital. The key

for a deployer or operator is making sure their equipment gets connected and stays connected to the internet. There are many connectivity options available in the marketplace, and we will do our best to explore each option along with the benefits and potential drawbacks of each so that you can ensure your operations run smoothly and customers have a consistent positive experience.

EXISTING LOCAL INTERNET CONNECTIONS

It is enticing to look for low-cost or “free” connectivity solutions when setting up a new deployment location. If there is an existing local internet connection available at the location, this can be a good option to explore. The upside is that there aren’t any additional costs to incur, and most local connections will have decent bandwidth speeds.

However, if you are placing equipment at a location you don’t own, most of these third-party venues don’t want outside equipment or devices on their networks for security purposes, so this makes it more challenging to take advantage of an existing connection on premises.

It can also be more time-consuming to get local IT to work with you, and then you also don’t have any control when the network goes down. The associated costs (service calls, lost sales, shrinkage) of one client-provided data line failure will usually offset the cost of having provided your own solution for three years.



Andrey Rykov | iStock

LOCAL WI-FI

Another option most operators will look at when setting up is the availability of local Wi-Fi networks that they can jump on. Typically, there are no monthly data charges, and it is a quick and easy way to get their equipment operational while also keeping their monthly operating expenses low.



However, like existing local area network connections, using an existing Wi-Fi connection provides no control when the network goes down since someone else is managing it. There are also risks with security, and most networks are not compliant with PCI for credit card payment processing.

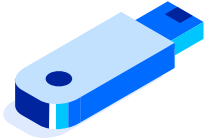
Pros
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ No monthly data costs✓ Satisfactory bandwidth speeds
Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ Possible need to open firewalls or to enable security rules with IT can be burdensome✗ Static IP connections are rare✗ Spotty internet service or poor download/upload speed✗ Local IT might be resistant or unwilling to troubleshoot your potential internet connectivity problems

Pros
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ No monthly data costs✓ Quick and easy to get operational
Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ Not a secure connection method – security concerns✗ Connection speeds can change depending on number of users✗ Wi-Fi may not be PCI compliant

PURCHASED AIRCARD, MIFI OR JETPACK

Operators looking for a relatively quick and easy way to bring their own cellular connectivity may look at deploying a device like a jetpack to handle their connectivity needs that they purchase from Verizon or AT&T. Once purchased, the device is ready to use and connect securely to with relative ease. It alleviates some of the drawbacks of the options previously listed because it is more secure than Wi-Fi and other public networks.

One of the major drawbacks of this type of connectivity is that it is not built for commercial applications so it may not be able to handle the demands of a busy breakroom. If an issue is encountered, it will require a manual power cycle where the operator will have to visit the location to remedy the problem. While this may work for a location or two, it is difficult to scale and be a long-term solution for a larger operator.



Pros
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Setup is simple✓ Secure network connectivity
Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ Monthly data costs✗ Subject to either overages or slowing after certain data thresholds✗ To reset lost connections usually requires a manual power cycle✗ Designed for personal and not commercial use

PURCHASED HARDWARE AND SET UP DATA PLANS

Operators looking to manage their own connectivity can purchase a cellular modem from a hardware manufacturer and set up their own data plans with a carrier. This option alleviates many of the issues addressed earlier because you can manage the network directly and gives you full control. If the location is in a spot that has good cellular coverage, this could be a good option.

The drawback is that most operators don't have the expertise and/or time to deal with setups, configurations, software, security, data plans and carrier relationships, troubleshooting, etc. Instead of focusing on running a successful business, operators using this option are forced to spend considerable resources managing their own connectivity, which takes them away from focusing on what they are good at.

If a piece of hardware does have issues, operators must try and remedy things on their own with little help or support from suppliers. Purchasing hardware upfront can also be very expensive depending upon the size of the operation and how many locations they are connecting.

Pros

- ✓ You have full control of the hardware and data plans
- ✓ Secure connectivity

Cons

- ✗ Monthly data costs
- ✗ Setting up the configurations with all the different options can be difficult for a novice
- ✗ Coordinating data plans to be as low as possible without hitting overages can be a time-consuming balancing act
- ✗ Maintaining portfolios with software versions can require trained and dedicated resources for communications

MANAGED SERVICE PROVIDER

One other option to consider for your internet connectivity needs is partnering with a fully managed solution provider that allows an operator to outsource their connectivity needs to someone else.

By partnering with a fully managed solution provider, operators can effectively outsource one of the most important components to their success to a reliable partner who focuses 100% of their time to making sure their devices stay connected. Operators pay for the data that they use and are protected from huge overages while also having one point of contact if they have any issues with their connectivity.

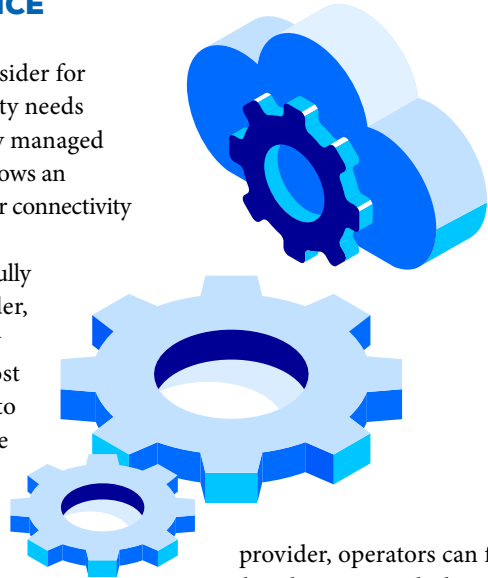
A managed solution provider offers ease of installation, network security, purchase and lease options, customized data plans and more. By partnering with a managed service

Pros

- ✓ Single source of contact 24/7 support for both hardware and connection issues
- ✓ Ease of installation for virtual plug and play
- ✓ Network security, connectivity, profiles, firmware upgrades are handled by the managed solutions provider – reducing your risk
- ✓ Ability to have multiple carriers and pay just one bill

Cons

- ✗ Possibly higher monthly communication costs since all features and management are included
- ✗ Not a good option if cellular reception is poor at a given location



provider, operators can focus on their business with the peace of mind that their equipment will get connected and stay connected. With plug-and-play functionality built in, all the operator has to do is plug in the device and use it.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the strengths and drawbacks of the options available is necessary to select the best one for each application.

From using an existing local internet connection or publicly available Wi-Fi network to a fully managed wireless solution, and everything in between, it's important to know your options and choose the connectivity solution that's best for your vending kiosks. ■



About the author

Brian Gill is a national sales executive of OptConnect. Gill is responsible for growing the company's services across multiple verticals. His main expertise is in the unattended

retail space. With more than 30 years of progressive career growth in executive-level positions in the vending, amusements and coin-op laundry, Gill is a high-energy business leader with deep industry and multi-generational relationships. He can be reached at brian.gill@optconnect.com.



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Plant-based foods for on-the-go convenience

Better-for-you options in single-serve packages are growing rapidly for vending and micro markets.

By Molly Rogers, Managing Editor

TODAY, CONSUMERS ARE MOVING TOWARD A HEALTHIER lifestyle overall, and this includes shifting to better-for-you products and a focus on individual wellness needs. No matter the reasons why consumers are choosing to eat less animal products, the plant-based food industry is booming – with millennials and Gen Z driving the market growth.

THE PLANT-BASED FOOD CATEGORY

For consumers, choosing a plant-based diet means prioritizing plant foods, specifically fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, legumes, nuts and seeds, which are rich in vitamins, minerals, fiber, antioxidants and healthy fats. Studies show that consumers are making plant-based foods the main part of their diet, but not necessarily exclusive.

For sources of protein, consumers are looking to tofu, edamame, lentils, chickpeas, peanuts, almonds and quinoa, for example. Vegetables with the most protein include broccoli, spinach, asparagus, artichokes, potatoes and Brussels sprouts.

Consumers are also increasingly interested in the health benefits of several types of mushrooms, which are a good source of fiber





According to Bloomberg Intelligence, the plant-based foods market could make up to 7.7% of the global protein market by 2030, with a value of over \$162 billion, up from \$29.4 billion in 2020.

and antioxidants, and fungi are even featured in ready-to-drink beverages, snacks and coffee. According to Allied Marketing Research, the global functional mushroom market is expected to reach \$19.33 billion by 2030, and a rise in demand for organic reishi mushroom products and usage of mushrooms as a supplement to meat products present new opportunities in the coming years.

The plant-based diet is also fueling the rise of meat alternative products. Plant-based food companies are making burgers, faux chicken nuggets, sausages and hot dogs, to name a few, look and taste similar to the real thing.

What's also clear today is that consumers are thirsty for knowledge on how products are made, what's in them,



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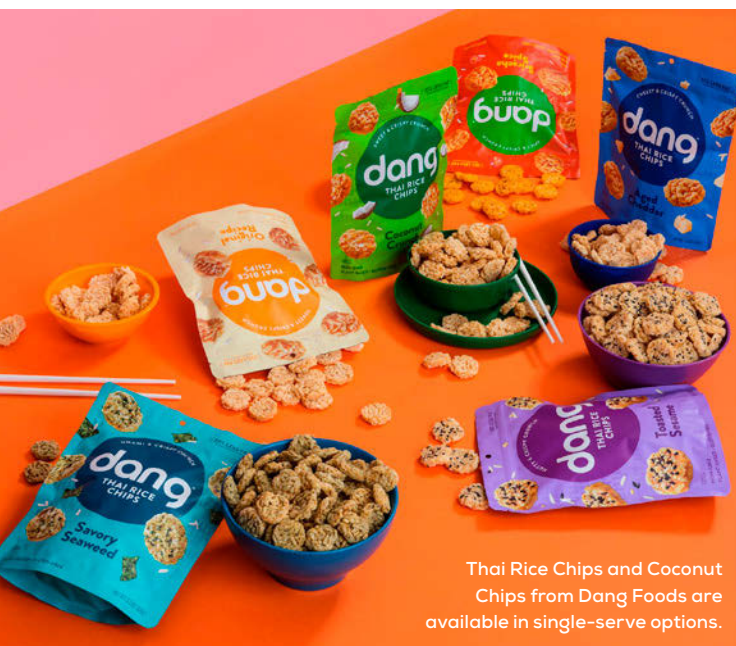
how they will benefit their health and wellness, and how our choices in food products help or harm the environment. Armed with this information, consumers are now more willing to try new products and be adventurous. Cauliflower rice? Tofu oatmeal? Sure, they'll give it a try.

PLANT-BASED FOOD MARKET POISED FOR GROWTH

According to data published at Statista, the global plant-based food market is expected to reach \$77.8 billion in 2025, and further growth is expected. The forecast projects that by 2030, the market will have more than doubled. For 2022, the model expects a market worth \$44.2 billion.

According to Bloomberg Intelligence, the plant-based foods market could make up to 7.7% of the global protein market by 2030, with a value of over \$162 billion, up from \$29.4 billion in 2020. The report identifies growth expectations for the plant-based foods market through 2030, as global animal and dairy protein demand is poised to reach \$1.2 trillion by then. If the alternative meat market follows a similar growth pattern to that of plant-based milk, BI projects the alternative meat market to increase from \$4.2 billion to \$74 billion in the next 10 years. According to the report, industry giants including Beyond Meat, Impossible Foods and Oatly are driving the increase in plant-based food options, and more traditional and established companies, like Kellogg and Nestlé, are looking to increase their distribution of plant-based products.

For the global dairy alternatives market, it is expected to grow from \$19.79 billion in 2020 to \$47.95 billion by 2028, at a CAGR of 11.7% during the forecast period 2021-2028,



Thai Rice Chips and Coconut Chips from Dang Foods are available in single-serve options.

according to a report published by Fior Markets. Rice milk, almond milk and soy milk are among the most common dairy alternatives worldwide.

WHO IS DRIVING THE MARKET?

According to the NPD Group food industry analysts, Gen Z and millennials are leading the way, who choose plant-based foods for better health, as well as their interest in sustainability and animal welfare. “About one in five adults say they want more plant-based foods in their diets, and that number remained steady throughout 2020,” according to the NPD Group’s “The Future of Plant-based Snapshot: The Evolution of Plant-based Continues.” The report says that their interest extends beyond burgers and almond milk – plant-based opportunities can be found in frozen, shelf-stable, indulgent and snack categories. It also reports that about 90% of them are neither vegetarian nor vegan, so their focus is on options, and taste and convenience is most important.

GRAB-AND-GO PLANT-BASED SNACKS

Plant-based snacks can be a convenient, healthy choice for consumers on the go, and food manufacturers from startups to leading CPG companies are offering many options.

For example, Brothers All-Natural, based in Rochester, N.Y., offers freeze-dried fruit snacks in 0.35-oz. bags and 1-oz. bags. “Our Fuji apples, strawberries, bananas, Asian pears and mangos are freeze-dried to retain the flavors and nutrients of the fruit with no additives or preservatives,” said Andy Keane, marketing manager. “Our fruit products are allergen-friendly and contain one ingredient – fruit.” The convenient packaging makes them perfect for on-the-go snacking.



Brothers All-Natural offers freeze-dried fruit snacks in convenient packs.

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Oloves Marinated Pitted Olive Snacks are available in 1.1-oz. packages.



Poshi offers Steamed & Marinated Vegetable Snacks.

"There are multiple options for plant-based options in every category of food. The category is consistently growing, and consumers are continuing to buy healthier food products everywhere," Keane added.

For another healthy option, Dang Foods, based in Berkeley, California, offers Coconut Chips and Thai Rice Chips. The company's founder, Vincent Kitaratragarn, was inspired by his Thai-American heritage to create snacks with Asian flavors. All of its products are made with plant-based, whole food ingredients, gluten-free and non-GMO. The single-serve options are available in 0.7-oz. bags. Kitaratragarn says that signage and education of benefits of plant-based nutrition is important for merchandising the products.

To meet the demand for vegetables on-the-go, companies such as Florida-based Poshi offers Steamed & Marinated Vegetable Snacks, including Marinated Artichokes with Basil & Thyme 1.58 oz., Marinated Asparagus Rosemary & Oregano 1.34 oz, Marinated Cauliflower Salt & Black Pepper 1.58 oz., and Marinated French Beans Lime & Garlic 1.76 oz. Among these, artichokes and cauliflower items are the best sellers, says Doruk Karakasoglu, vice president of sales and co-founder of Poshi. The veggie packs are peeled, steam cooked and lightly marinated.

The company also offers Oloves Marinated Pitted Olive Snacks – including Pitted Green Olives with flavors of Basil Garlic, Lemon Rosemary and Chili Oregano and Pitted Kalamata Olives with Chili Garlic flavor in convenient 1.1-oz. packages.

Both Poshi and Oloves products are non-GMO, gluten-free, vegan, keto-friendly, liquid-free and shelf stable.

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GLK Foods offers Oh Snap! Single-Serve Pickled Veggies.

Karakasoglu says that convenience service operators can best merchandise the products by showing and educating consumers that the displayed product is plant based. And, he is seeing a lot of growth potential.

“The plant-based category is popular and growing continuously. Using clean ingredients would be a key factor in the near future to differentiate products,” he said.

Lastly, reinventing pickling for the next generation is Wisconsin-based GLK Foods’ Oh Snap! Pickled Veggies. The single-serve pickled snacks include three sliced pickle items at 3.25 fl. oz. – Dilly Bites, Hottie Bites, Sassy Bites; two whole pickle items at 3.0 fl. oz. – Gone Dilly (classic dill), Hottie (dill & spice); and three pickled veggies – Carrot Cuties (carrot sticks) at 2.25 fl. oz., and Cool Beans (green beans) and Pretty Peas (snap peas) at 1.5 fl. oz.

All are gluten-free, fat-free, vegan, and made with non-GMO veggies. They are packed in convenient single-serve pouches with no added brine, and products can be placed in open-air coolers, behind cooler doors and in refrigerated vending machines.

“Oh Snap! brand has delivered over 60% growth year over year since launch in 2015,” said Ben Wehner, business development manager. “And, it has over 175,000 points of distribution across the U.S. and Canada.” Nationally, over 100 million Oh Snap! pickles and pickled veggies are enjoyed each year.

“Consumers are searching for more plant-based snacking options in convenient single-serve packaging, but, most of all, that are great tasting,” added Wehner. ■



“Consumers are searching for more plant-based snacking options in convenient single-serve packaging, but, most of all, that are great tasting.”

– Ben Wehner, GLK Foods

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Stick-to-itive



The one-two punch of Hurricane Michael followed by the COVID pandemic only strengthened the Florida operators' resolve to emerge smarter and stronger.

By Emily Cambriello, Contributing Editor

ness pays off



Where tasty

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Father and son Chuck and Josh Giambra have been off to a running start in the first half of 2022 with steady growth in their Florida Panhandle vending business.

Photos courtesy of Giambra Vending

GIAMBRA VENDING ACHIEVED THE \$1 MILLION revenue milestone in 2021, up 40% over the prior year, and 2022 is off to a strong start. The nearly two-decade journey has been everything but smooth sailing, but the Florida vending operation has persevered through unprecedented challenges. And with its recent foray into micro markets, cashless payment and prekitting, owner Josh Giambra is optimistic that there's plenty more growth ahead.

In fact, Automatic Merchandiser has given Giambra its vote as one of its inaugural "40 under 40" award recipients, which recognizes outstanding young individuals making a difference in convenience services.



Josh Giambra started his vending business part-time in 2005 at age 20, with the help of his father, Charles Giambra, in Panama City, a small sport-fishing coastal town on Florida's panhandle. He was in college with a full-time job as a pizza delivery driver, and his dad worked full-time as a marketing sales representative.

A search for a side venture led them to a "blue sky" business opportunity that promised overnight success with three Red Bull vending machines. The prime locations they'd hoped to secure didn't pan out and revenue was slow, so they branched out beyond those locations and added honor boxes to their route, which thankfully exceeded the fledgling operators' expectations and helped them affordably expand into more locations.

"I remember sitting on the floor the first time we counted the collections and we felt like we hit the big time!" Giambra recalled. The operators continued to expand their honor box placements and used the revenue to reinvest in the business.

They purchased a batch of used equipment from a supplier they tracked down in Mobile, Alabama, for \$750 a machine that turned out not to be location-ready as promised. So Giambra taught himself the tricks of the trade and refurbished the equipment himself.

"I learned that I could figure it out. I realized that buying a refrigeration deck was only one-third of the cost I had

paid someone to repair the unit," he said. "Then, we vigorously searched surrounding areas for people we could buy cheap machines from and we refurbished them ourselves and kept saving and investing."

The operators ramped up their efforts to expand the business both organically and through acquisitions, fueling several years of growth. Revenue in 2013 rose 42% from a year earlier, and Giambra became the sole owner of Giambra Vending, with Charles remaining a route driver ever since.

In 2009, Giambra left his day job delivering pizza, and in 2015 he left his second job (fun fact) playing the role of a pirate on a family adventure cruise and intensely pursued growing his vending business. Remaining committed to the core values of integrity, flexibility and superb customer service, on which he and his father founded Giambra Vending, he had 330 machines in his arsenal by 2018.

HURRICANE STRIKES

Business was rolling along until October of that year, when over the course of a few hours, Category 5 Hurricane Michael hit, causing Giambra Vending to lose more than 100 machines and one-third of its revenue. The storm caused catastrophic damage to the city and surrounding

Josh and Chuck Giambra at the official opening of their first micro market in 2021. Its success has set their sights on pursuing more locations for the self-checkout stores.

communities. Numerous homes were flattened, trees fell over a wide swath of the panhandle and strong winds caused extensive power outages across the region.

The Giambras learned the hard way how important it is for a vending company along the Emerald Coast to be prepared as best possible for a hurricane of such magnitude.

"They thought it would be a Category 2 on Tuesday afternoon, so we ran our routes, did a light restock, collected money, and parked our trucks in front of the building to help protect glass windows. And then it became a Category 5," Giambra recalled. "Trees fell on our house and we had no power or water for 30 days. We had no cell service to check on our family to see if they were OK. Most roads were impassable."

The first thing the operators did was secure their homes and then made their way to check on loved ones they could

reach in person. Next, they drove to the outer reaches spared by the hurricane where there was cell service to call their remaining relatives and friends and found all were safe.

Finally, they trekked into the office to find that the facility and trucks were thankfully less hard hit than their homes were. The father and son operators kicked into action and loaded their trucks with snacks and drinks and distributed them to the many people caught off guard unprepared and without food throughout the devastated community.

“

In three hours, we lost a third of our business, which we had worked so hard for. All we could do was do things old-school on paper and get the machines that we could filled."

– Josh Giambra

VENDING MACHINE RESCUES

Giambra then began assessing the damage to their equipment, where he could, and performing "vending machine rescues" at buildings that were still standing, wearing waterproof, steel-toed boots and wading through ankle-deep water in many cases.

"At every machine where people could, they had smashed the glass to get to snacks, like it was an apocalypse," the operator recalled. "It was a race to save every machine we could, along with money and product in them. They were demolishing buildings with our machines in them. With the help of my wife, Christy, we tried to assess at least 10 machines a day, for product, money and damage."



Category 5 Hurricane Michael hit in October 2018, wiping out 100 of Giambra Vending's machines and a third of its revenue. The operators were able to rebuild and grow, and they have developed a game plan should such a disaster strike again.



Josh Giambra and his wife, Christy, Giambra worked as a pirate on an adventure-themed cruise ship and pizza delivery driver while he grew his vending business.



OPERATION PROFILE

Giambra Vending

Founded: 2005

Headquarters: Panama City, FL

Number of Routes: 2

Number of acquisitions: 12

Number of vending machines: 380

Number of Micro Markets: 1

Tech/equipment providers: Parlevel Systems, Seaga, Vendors Repair, Vendors Exchange, D&S Vending Inc.

Distributors: Coca-Cola United, Stacy Williams, Petrey Wholesale, Vistar, Performance Foodservice, Buffalo Rock, Sam's Club

With cell service out for weeks, Josh would return to the office after each day's machine rescue missions and leave a note for his father, instructing him which machines to service and which were beyond salvageable.

"In three hours, we lost a third of our business, which we had worked so hard for," he said. "All we could do was do things old-school on paper and get the machines that we could filled."

It took three weeks to take inventory of all 330 machines. The operators were forced to move 100-plus machines, some working, many not, out of shuddered buildings and those under construction, all within a few months. Giambra just picked up the last two machines damaged by the hurricane at a building where the elevator was only recently repaired.

LESSONS LEARNED

The operators learned how to best prepare for the inevitable hurricanes in the future and have their protocols in place. Instead of having a three-day supply of water and food on hand, they will have enough to last at least a week.

In the event of an impending hurricane, Giambra will also pull all snacks from its glass-front machines and shut them down. "It's not feasible to bring all machines back to our warehouse, or we would have that as the plan," Giambra commented.

The operators have also installed cameras in their warehouse so they will know if power is out for four hours or more and dispose of any refrigerated food.

The operators also take pictures of their trucks, machines and warehouse when a storm threatens for insurance purposes and now have loss of income insurance.

"We now train our employees how to go 'old school' without technology if power is out," he said. "They know the most important thing is to make sure their families are safe should anything happen. Then, if we can make it to the office, we'll leave hand-written notes to each other to communicate."

TECHNOLOGICAL LEAP

Just before the hurricane, Giambra had partnered with Parlevel Systems to implement its vending management system and make the move to install cashless readers.

"I give Parlevel hearts, asterisks and stars for moving us to a VMS and cashless, along with micro markets and soon prekitting. I'm in love with them!" Giambra exclaimed. "When it was me and my dad and 50 machines, we used sticky notes and pens. When there are other people involved and 100-plus machines, Excel spreadsheets would take years for us to ever know if we're short. Parlevel can go to the nickel what should be in the machine."

With the VMS in place, Parlevel facilitated the company's move to cashless with a scalable approach, since outfitting all

DOT'S PRETZELS IS A PROUD RECIPIENT
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40 UNDER FORTY

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Who's Your Top Candidate?

JOB COMMITMENT • INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT • CONTRIBUTION
ACHIEVEMENT IN THEIR POSITION • INNOVATION IN THE FIELD

Featured in the September issue of the magazine, 40 Under 40 highlights innovators who demonstrate leadership and a commitment to advancing convenience services for vending, micro markets and workplace beverages.

*Acknowledge yourself or a colleague for dedication
to the convenience services industry.*



Deadline: July 1, 2022

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Nominees must be
39 years old or younger as of
July 1, 2022, to be eligible.

of its 300-plus machines at once was neither affordable nor practical for the small but growing company.

Giambra Vending operated six machines at a mall that seemed to be the ideal testing ground for cashless.

On Oct. 8, 2018, the credit card readers were up and running. On October 10, Hurricane Michael hit and the mall was among the locations destroyed, with cell service lost before Giambra could even assess the performance of its cashless payment trial.

The first message Giambra received when he reached an area with cellular service was from Parlevel. The technology company saw that all of the machines in the mall were offline and wanted to see if everything was ok. Being a supportive partner, they were ready to help any way they could.

When the machines were finally back online, Giambra Vending was impressed with the results and upgraded its machines with cashless acceptance in phases and just recently completed installing the technology on the last of the machines in its fleet.

All of the company's machines and its office coffee service are also now on Parlevel's vending management system. More recently, Giambra Vending expanded Parlevel's

technology to its first micro market kiosk and started prekitting mid-March.

"We've never used any other VMS platform and have no reason to. I only know 50% of its capabilities and there's so much more we can grow into," Giambra said. "Their system can order for us once our warehouse is set up, which we're working on. And with OCS and pantry with Parlevel, customers can go online and order and they have proven at the hardest of times to be there with great customer service and support."

ON THE REBOUND

Heading into 2020, Giambra Vending was well on its way to a great comeback with year-over-year revenue increases of 45% and machine placement higher than before the hurricane.

"It took a year to get on our feet after the hurricane. People built new buildings," the operator recalled. "We saw traction and growth and got new accounts as more businesses opened."

Its next big push was to dive into office coffee service to round out its services to its clients and sustain the company in the off season from November to February when vending sales are typically down. The operators took out a small business loan to purchase equipment and expanded swiftly into OCS and pantry and were met with enthusiasm as customers signed on for the services.

COVID STRIKES

Then the pandemic hit, locations shut down and revenues plummeted. Office coffee business was the hardest hit with empty offices and social distancing making breakroom refreshments in the least demand.

"This warehouse had never been so organized and clean! Revenue was down; places were all closed, we had all this product and we were sitting around twiddling our thumbs organizing the warehouse like never before," Giambra recalled.

So with his "make lemonade when life hands you lemons" approach to inevitable challenges, Giambra worked with Parlevel to offset his company's losses, continue to serve his customers, and help other companies in the same boat.

It took just seven weeks to launch Parlevel Run, an online ordering platform through which Parlevel partnered with Shopify to offer local home delivery of products, including drinks, snacks, paper towels, toilet paper and cleaning supplies, that were in high demand and short supply, from the vending company directly to the consumer.

But just as the system got up and running, the stay-at-home orders lifted and the majority of people wanted to get back out rather than stay in, making Parlevel Run less successful than anticipated, but that just inspired the



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(Above) Ryan Jimerson loads a truck for the day's deliveries that he prekitted using Parlevel technology and reorganized warehouse and new procedures that the company recently put into action. (Below) Giambra shows a new employee how to stock a truck for optimal organization and efficiency.

operator to push harder. Giambra Vending still offers the online ordering service for shipping but not local home delivery, which brings in some incremental business.

Once accounts began to open back up, Josh stood by the company's core values to continue to grow.

"Luckily, Florida was not shut down for too long with COVID," Giambra said. "Before COVID, we had just hired a new driver, Chris. Tapping into our savings and utilizing the Paycheck Protection Program loan helped get us through a time of low revenue and we were able to keep everyone employed."

GROWING STRONG

Giambra Vending has grown both organically and by acquiring a dozen small routes over its 17 years in business, some with as few as one to two machines and others with as many as 40. Today, the company operates just shy of 400 machines and is in a steady growth mode.

The operator holds high standards for his machines, most of which have undergone extensive upgrades, since he has picked up a lot of legacy equipment through acquisitions.

The company invests exclusively in Seaga vending machines for its new equipment. Giambra Vending also partners with Coca-Cola as a third-party operator.

FRIENDLY COMPETITION

From the beginning, Giambra has shared the knowledge and skills he gained along the way to help his fellow operators. He has a strong commitment not only to his

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Giambra welcomes latest shipment of Seaga vending machines and readies them for deployment.

customers but also to anyone in the industry who reaches out for his assistance, and he continues to take all of his calls personally.

"I always try to help other vending companies, and I see my competitors as colleagues," he commented. "I've even worked on their machines, sold them parts, given advice, and have had the opportunity to buy many of them out. We're all in this together. I have been helped by other companies and colleagues in the industry, and I want to be able to share that knowledge with others."

LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES

The good news is demand for convenience services is back in full swing. Despite some locations that have shifted to remote work not having full staff onsite, and some that

have gone fully remote, there are plenty seeking Giambra's vending and growing OCS and pantry services as never before to cater to employees in a market where it's tough to find and retain talent.

But one of the biggest challenges Giambra is grappling with, like everyone in every industry, is supply chain disruptions, leaving it short of key products and equipment.

"Getting products has been incredibly challenging. If we get 60% of our order on

almost every order, we're lucky," the operator lamented. "We have empty slots in machines. We can only double up on so many."

Becoming tired of seeing empty slots in his machines, he decided to branch out from strict planograms and contacted his distributor and asked if they could substitute out-of-stock items with something else in their warehouse

with every order. "We've also reached out to untraditional distributors like grocery, c-store and even restaurant distributors," he said. "We are now ordering from seven different distributors. It's a lot to manage, but it's better than not having any product at all!"

Giambra has also been navigating supply chain shortages that have led to long delays receiving new vending machines.

"We started the ordering process from Seaga in August and we only recently received the last of the machines in mid-March; that's how bad it is. They have no control over the delays and challenges either, and it's a ripple effect," he remarked. "There are so many obstacles to navigate because the supply chain is daunting to overcome. The good news is that everyone knows about the supply chain challenges everywhere in their lives. I'm thankful that my customers have been so patient and flexible waiting for their equipment, and understanding when we just can't get the exact products they want."

MICRO MARKET DEBUT

Giambra Vending opened its first micro market in 2021 at an existing technology company it served in Fort Walton, Florida, two hours away from the vending company's headquarters, that requested the transition from vending.

"We are very happy with our first market and so is the location. There are no coin or bill jams or product hanging. They just scan the item, so there are relatively no issues and it's OK that we are two hours away," Giambra commented. "Our goal is to respond to any service call within 24 hours, which we are able to manage, but we're also looking for someone local to oversee the location and others as we continue to expand."

Before opening his first micro market, Giambra had done his homework and determined three rules in order for a location to qualify for his investment in installing and operating a self-checkout store, which requires a \$3,000 monthly minimum in revenue.

First is that if there's any shortage from theft, the location is liable to pay Giambra or to terminate the employee who stole. The second is that the location absorbs the cost for spoilage of any fresh foods items. And the final rule is that the location has a pest-control contract, and if not, the location must pay for an extermination service should there be any issue.

"One of our core values is flexibility so this system lets us manage spoilage," Giambra said. "For micro markets, the account has to meet the minimum revenue agreed upon; if they don't, they are billed for the remaining balance."

ONWARD AND UPWARD

Giambra Vending has recently added prekitting to its warehouse operation and is in the process of reconfiguring the

“

There are so many obstacles to navigate because the supply chain is daunting to overcome.”

– Josh Giambra

layout for the proper flow and adding shelving for drinks and snacks, with Parlevel's guidance.

Giambra Vending employs one full-time driver, Chris, along with Josh's father Charles and has just hired its first full-time warehouse employee, Ryan, to support its move to prekitting. Giambra's two sons, Thomas and Kaden, also help in the busy summer months.

"Next will be a service technician and then a bookkeeper/secretary," Giambra said. "Not being fully staffed, I'm the service tech, the bookkeeper, the warehouse guy, and I wear so many other hats, so it's tough to keep growing and let customers know all we offer when I can't get out and tell them. That will change soon once we're able to make these new hires."

The operator has also taken the time to lay out his plans for his business 20 years ahead, which he says will be critical to keeping it on track for the growth and success he anticipates.

"Since this was just a side venture in the beginning, I didn't plan anything for the first 20 years and have learned



Giambra Vending route driver Chris Smith keeps in close touch with clients and customers to ensure machine menus are tailored to meet their preferences.

how important it is to have an end in mind and a plan for one, five, 10 years and 20-year goals and not just go through the motions of getting through each day," he summed up.

With all of life's uncertainty, Giambra says one certainty is that by committing his company to its core values, adapting to new technology, and working closely with other operators for the good of the industry as a whole, he will continue to keep his business growing. ■

Marketplace

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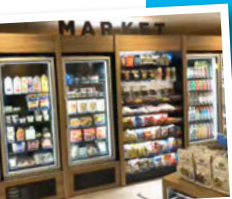
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It comes as no surprise to anyone here that everyone at Translucent LLC lead by Patty Closser and Steve Closser were

named Allied Members of the Year by the National Automatic Merchandising Association. Our thanks go out to them for always going well above and beyond, and for their hard work, leadership and dedication to what they do. It has been an absolute pleasure working with them and we look forward to the journey ahead. Here's a 2 minute or so video of memories we've shared with them over the years. Enjoy!



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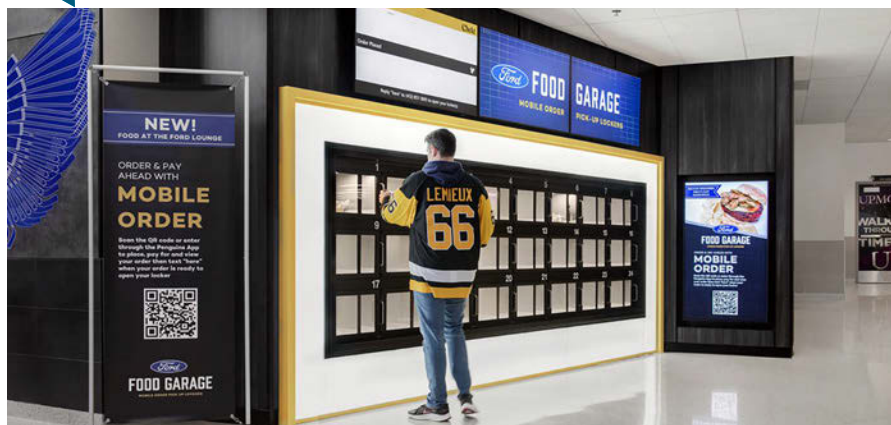


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