

PANTRY SERVICE

One snack at a time page 26

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operators/owners
**Larry and
Blake Jones »**

**ROUTE DRIVER
OF THE YEAR**

**Bostonbean's
Ace On The Road**
page 16

Uncompromising
Service and Excellence

POT O' GOLD'S REBOUND

How Seattle's office coffee pioneer
survived COVID's devastating
blow to emerge stronger than ever
page 38

February/March 2022

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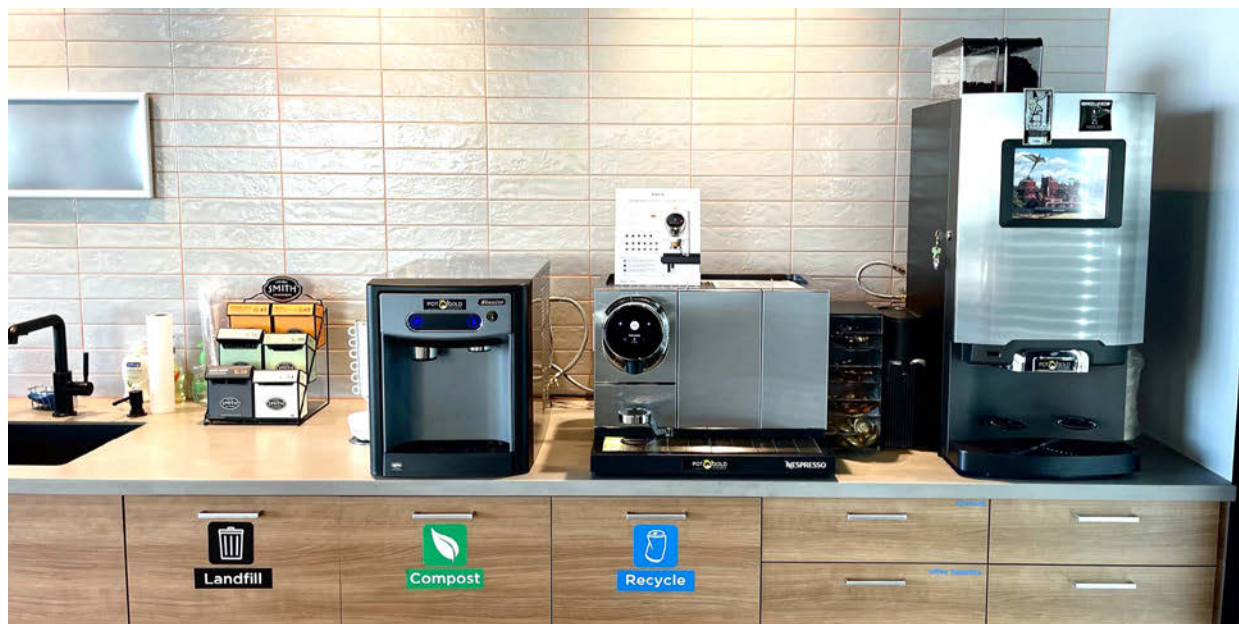
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On the cover: Father-and-son operators/owners Larry and Blake Jones

ONLINE EXCLUSIVES

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Interviews, Expert Insight & Tips

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Five resolutions for sales success



Bob Tullio

WHEN SELLING COFFEE SERVICE ON A TELEMARKETING call and the prospect says, "There is no way I will change services, I am very happy"; consider a creative response like, "What if I give you the coffee for free? Would that be of interest to you?" Being creative is one of Bob Tullio's five resolutions for sales success in 2022.
VendingMarketWatch.com/21254287

M&As | 2022 outlook heats up

Professional Vending Consultants recorded its third-best year for brokering operator sales, with 10 deals valued at more than \$40 million each. Other leading brokers had similar success, making 2021 one of the best years for M&As. PVC owner Marc Rosset advises on the year ahead.

VendingMarketWatch.com/21251792



Marc Rosset

First To Market | EMV multi-vend incremental authorization

Nayax is the first cashless vending provider offering incremental authorization for EMV-compliant multi-vend transactions to U.S. operators. Chief executive Carly Furman details the new capability.

VendingMarketWatch.com/21255477

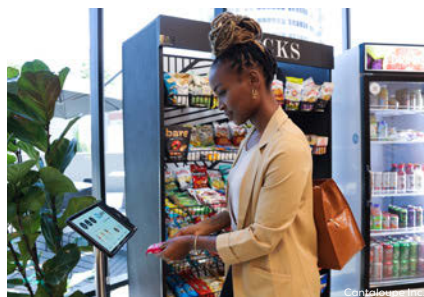


Carly Furman

Special Report

▼ ▼ ▼ Micro Market

Yoke self-checkout platform gets makeover



MICRO MARKET NEWS

Cantaloupe Inc.'s new Yoke platform includes an upgraded customer interface, improved promotion and loyalty tools, and QuickScan functionality. These new features work together to keep micro market customers more engaged.

VendingMarketWatch.com/21254518

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Last notes on an extraordinary assignment



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“

I've enjoyed informing you, challenging you, supporting you, channeling you and, occasionally, irritating you.”

THIS IS MY LAST COLUMN AS EDITOR OF *AUTOMATIC MER-*

chandiser. For the past year, my assignment has been to try to live up to the magazine's journalistic standards during a historic inflection point for the vending and office coffee service industries. I'm fortunate to have had the opportunity to help guide the magazine and its online sister brand, VendingMarketWatch.com, through 2021's COVID roller coaster ride. That responsibility weighed heavily, most days. It was not only challenging for the industry we covered, but also for B2B publishing itself. But as it turned out, it was a time of pronounced advancements for both.

Personally, it was a great honor to help steer the groundbreaking magazine (originally *American Automatic Merchandiser*) founded in 1958 by Ben Ginsberg and Mike Michaels through that period of prodigious change. The founders both hailed from the bottling industry, a forerunner to modern full-line vending. Today, *AM* is the only independent journal in the convenience services sector that delivers valuable information to audiences both online and in print.

I got to know Ginsberg later in his life, after he started *Vending and OCS*, a bimonthly trade published between 1991 and 2009. He served as its editor for 18 years. A longtime participant in and observer of the vending industry, Ginsberg was among the first journalists to identify the office coffee service business that emerged in the late 1960s. I think he would have approved of this issue's OCS focus with Seattle's Pot O' Gold Coffee Service on the cover, BostonbeaN's Kamden Mauser as Route Driver of the Year and a timely pantry advice piece.

He'd also agree that there probably hasn't been a time in the industry's modern history when the role of trade media was more important than now. Last year, we had the hard task of publishing two studies examining vending and OCS sales performance during the first year of the pandemic. And we got it right. *AM*'s annual State of the Industry reports showed sales in the vending and micro market segment down 45%, while OCS sales plunged more than 75%. After a decade of steady revenue growth, more than half of the industry's revenues were erased in a 10-month period. Yet, most operators survived. Initially, we thought 2020's losses would be a blip on the radar. But the effects of the pandemic and subsequent supply chain bottlenecks, rising inflation and labor shortages will likely dawdle for several years. Still, most operators will survive.

I've enjoyed informing you, challenging you, supporting you, channeling you and, occasionally, irritating you. Operators have a story to tell, and we give them a voice. That mission continues. Molly Rogers, a talented journalist at Endeavor Business Media, the owner of *Automatic Merchandiser* and VendingMarketWatch.com, is the new editor. Rogers officially took over editorial responsibilities on March 1.

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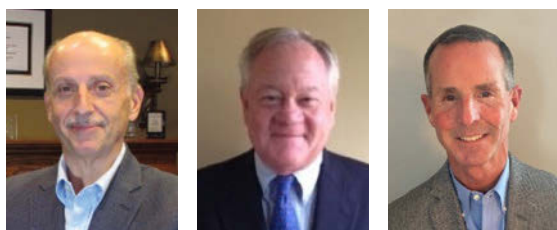
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TOP NEWS

Five Star strengthens executive team with 3 key promotions

[LEADERSHIP]



Five Star

From left, Mark Stephanos, Jeff Parks and Frank Field take on expanded roles at Five Star.

FIVE STAR FOOD SERVICE INC.

promoted three key company leaders to new executive positions. The promotions will allow the regional convenience services firm to “right-size” its corporate organizational structure for its 35-branch multi-state operation.

Mark Stephanos becomes executive vice president of operations, a new post added to the firm’s management structure. He brings 40 years’ experience in vending and foodservice.

Jeff Parks, previously president of Five Star’s Atlanta region, will now serve as the company’s senior vice president of retail operations. He assumes Stephanos’ prior role.

Frank Field, who joined Five Star 15 months ago as strategic initiatives director, has been promoted to vice president of retail support. Field spent the past five years in micro markets and purchasing at Imperial, a Canteen franchise.

Founded in 1993 and based in Tennessee, Five Star is one of the largest privately held vending firms in the U.S. and largest franchise of Canteen, a Compass Group company.



Sodexo to buy Accent

The French catering behemoth agreed to acquire Frontline Food Services (dba Accent Food Services), a fast-growing U.S. micro market and vending operation. Financial terms were not disclosed. The acquisition follows several others in the U.S. made by the Paris-based firm in 2021, including startup Foodee and commissary kitchen model Nourish Inc. Accent began as a family-owned vending business in central Texas and expanded operations to the mid-Atlantic, Arizona and Nevada.

VendingMarketWatch.com/21252548

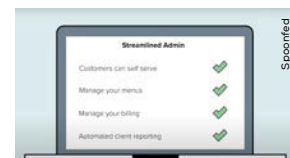


Five Star acquires coastal GA’s Rawls

Five Star Food Service acquired Rawls Distributing, a Canteen franchise based in Savannah, GA. The acquisition expands Five Star’s territory to the east and north along Georgia’s coast from its nearby locations in Brunswick and Douglas. The operation was founded in 1976 as a Tom’s Foods franchise by

brothers Robin and Kevin Rawls. Robin assumed sole ownership when Kevin died in 1995. In June 2021, the unexpected death of Robin set into motion plans for the family to sell the company.

VendingMarketWatch.com/21252674



365 purchases catering platform

365 Retail Markets has acquired Spoonfed, a Glasgow-based tech firm that provides software to contract caterers and restaurants in the U.S., UK and western Europe. Spoonfed software is sold through web-based subscriptions. It is reportedly used by three of the top 10 globally ranked universities. 365 chief executive Joe Hessling said Spoonfed has synergies with his company’s existing unattended retail offerings.

VendingMarketWatch.com/21250159

Partnership aims to add value to M&As

Three industry experts have formed a partnership to bring integrated marketing and M&A services to vending and OCS operators. John Salterio, Gary Pretzer and Orrin Huebner are building a marketing services program leveraging their 100-plus years of industry know-how and passion for success.

VendingMarketWatch.com/21255808

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Nayax

Nayax pays \$4.5M for OTI

Nayax Ltd entered a binding agreement to acquire On Track Innovations Ltd. for about \$4.5 million in cash. Both fintech firms are based in Israel. According to financial statements, OTI reported revenues of \$10.7 million in the first nine months of 2021. COVID-19, however, put cash flow pressures on OTI, forcing it into insolvency. "This acquisition is an important step in our plan to gain share in our targeted markets," said Nayax chief executive Yair Nechmad. OTI specialized in ATM readers and vending payment terminals. It had a presence in 50 countries. **VendingMarketWatch.com/21253840**



Hivery

Cantaloupe adds AI features to Seed VMS

Cantaloupe Inc. has teamed up with Hivery, a CPG data-science company, to integrate AI and machine learning capabilities to the Seed vending management system. The Hivery Enhance solution is expected to make Seed Pro and Seed Office an "even more intelligent tool for customers." Among the benefits are data sharing without third-party tools; automatic machine merchandising decisions; smarter coil allocations; and reduction

in restocking trips. Cantaloupe boasts more than 20,000 customers. **VendingMarketWatch.com/21251696**

Pierre Bellon was 92

Sodexo founder and chairman emeritus Pierre Bellon, who early on



Bellon

recognized the huge potential of the corporate services sector, died

in Paris on Jan. 31. He was 92. He established Sodexo SA (renamed Sodexo in 2008) in 1966 in Marseilles. Today, his company operates in 56 countries, employs 412,000 people and serves daily some 100 million consumers. **VendingMarketWatch.com/21255271**

MORE ONLINE



NAMA-led coalition secures introduction of ERTC fix in Senate

VendingMarketWatch.com/21256404

Arabica prices forecast to decline, robusta to gain

VendingMarketWatch.com/21253488

FAS International transitions to CO2 refrigeration

VendingMarketWatch.com/21251646

Hershey completes Dot's acquisition

VendingMarketWatch.com/21250404

PEOPLE IN THE NEWS



Bellon

Sodexo's interim CEO now permanent

The Paris-based foodservice giant appointed chairwoman Sophie Bellon as its permanent chief executive. She had held the post provisionally following last year's resignation of Denis Machuel. Bellon is daughter of Sodexo founder Pierre Bellon.



Hoskins

Craig Hoskins to lead PFG's Vistar unit

Performance Food Group Co. named Hoskins president and chief operating officer of Vistar, its vend product division. Former Vistar chief Pat Hagerty has advanced to executive vice president and chief commercial officer of PFG.



Hill

Pepsi Bottling Ventures taps new chief

The joint venture of Suntory Group and PepsiCo named Derek Hill president and chief executive. Hill has worked 30 years in the Pepsi system. He succeeds Paul Finney, who held the top PBV post for a decade.



Hoyme

Coke FL appoints FSOP vice president

Coca-Cola Beverages Florida promoted Tod Hoyme to vice president of foodservice and on-premise. Hoyme will lead sales and manage accounts in all FSOP channels, including vending and fountain operations.



Krail

AVS names new marketing director

The vending equipment distributor promoted Keith Krail to marketing director. Krail, who joined AVS Companies a year ago as digital marketing manager, replaces Cortney Kinzler, who's exited after 17 years.



Dumbrell

Jeff Dumbrell joins Cantaloupe as CRO

The digital payments company appointed Dumbrell chief revenue officer. He is responsible for the company's global sales and revenue strategies. Dumbrell has 20 years' experience in the payments sector.



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There's A New Sheriff In Town

A key selling point moves to center stage in 2022

By Bob Tullio

BABY BOOMERS PRETEND TO BE motivated by it, Gen X is certainly interested in it, but, in reality, the millennials and Gen Z are truly driven by one new and important selling point that is moving up to center stage in 2022.

When offices populate throughout this year, there's going to be a "new sheriff" in town. The traditionally minded baby boomer, the decision-maker with whom you dealt, has headed for greener pastures. According to Pew Research, "During the

bleak early days of the pandemic, in the third quarter of 2020, nearly 30 million baby boomers left the job market and retired." AARP says that 10,000 baby boomers retire every day.

SUSTAINABILITY FORWARD

Today's office decision-makers will have a new set of priorities and coffee service operators will need to be prepared to adapt. While the three key selling points of coffee service have traditionally revolved around quality, service and price, a new priority – sustainability – is now resonating in workplaces more than ever before.

Over the past year, I have discussed sustainability with some of the leading coffee service operators in our industry.

Judson Kleinman of Corporate Essentials, Matthew Marsh at First Class, Tom Steuber of Associated, David Baker at Premier and Tammy Stokes of Five Star, among several others, all agree that sustainability is a powerful selling point.

They have all seen it coming, but they concur, in today's workplace, sustainability is more important than ever, especially with millennials and Gen Z.





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“The pandemic didn’t start the sustainability revolution, but it has put it into hyperdrive, and Gen Z is in the driver’s seat,” wrote Greg Petro in a recent Forbes article that explored how important the sustainability issue has become.

THEY’LL PAY MORE

Petro cited a study that said most Generation Z shoppers prefer to buy sustainable brands and are most willing to spend more on sustainable products. The report also found that “Gen Z along with millennials are the most likely to make purchase decisions based on values and principles of sustainability.”

Take note: They are willing to pay more because sustainability is that important to them.

In a recent video on my b2b Perspective channel, I provided some strategies for convenience services operators on how to sell sustainability, authentically. It is important to put emphasis on the values and principles of sustainability, without coming off as self-serving.

“

It is important to put emphasis on the values and principles of sustainability, without coming off as self-serving.”

CONCEPTS THAT RESONATE

There are several OCS sustainability concepts that will resonate with the new generation of decision-makers. They want to see that your company is:

- Delivering value to your customers – selling ethically and responsibly.
- Limiting the environmental impact



with your product and service. Are you leaving the world as a better place for future generations?

- Doing what you can to offer clients some local and regional products that will benefit the local economy and the families of hard-working, small businesspeople – including South American coffee farmers.
- Providing ongoing opportunity and a healthy, responsible workplace for your own employees.
- Being generous to the community, including supporting local causes in a meaningful way.

SUPPLIER COMPLIERS

Several industry suppliers are offering products that deliver sustainable solutions to operators. They include:

- ColdSnap is expected to launch its frozen beverage machine this year. The CES Innovation Award winning device uses pods that are fully recyclable. Different pods produce different frozen treats, which are made by the ColdSnap machine.
- ānsa coffee will take the wraps off its micro roaster in 2022. It will allow operators to provide freshly roasted coffee to their clients, right in the comfort of their own breakrooms. Operators will sell green coffee beans to clients, a highly appealing and sustainable farm-to-office path.
- Marco Beverage and La Colombe Coffee have teamed up to provide bag-in-box cold brew, eliminating much of the carbon footprint

associated with storing and transporting kegs. The cold brew flows from Marco’s sleek and stylish POUR’D dispenser.

- In the coming months, you will hear more about gūdpod in office environments. Its 100% compostable Keurig and Nespresso compatible pods are made from 100% renewable materials.

These suppliers and many others are making it very easy for OCS and vending operators to offer sustainable and innovative refreshment solutions to workplaces.

CLIENTS NEED TO KNOW

Of course, many OCS operators have adhered to these principles and values long before doing business the right way carried the label of operating “sustainably.”

Today, it is important that your customers know that sustainability isn’t an act. It is who you are. It is the way you do business. Sustainability occurs because of how you operate your company. If you can successfully convey that message to prospects and clients in 2022 and beyond, many doors will open for you. ■



About the author

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.

Tullio, a former operator, also works with suppliers, helping them to successfully connect with operators. He created an online course, designed to develop elite sales professionals in the convenience services industry, for the National Automatic Merchandising Association.

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BostonbeaN's Ace on the Road

Kamden Mauser's creative pivot kept an OCS operation's revenue and customer relationships alive

By Nick Montano, Editor


**Route Driver
OF THE YEAR**

Automatic Vending
MERCHANDISER MARKETWATCH

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F EDEX AND UPS DRIVERS WON PRAISE AS THE unsung heroes of the COVID-19 crisis. And don't forget the gig workers clocking time on food delivery apps. While these blue-collar hands worked hard for that admiration, the truth is, it's much easier to be a driver for Amazon than to be a driver on a vending, micro market or office coffee service route.

Take BostonbeaN's Kamden Mauser, for instance. Like Mauser, drivers on the nation's convenience services routes must possess highly acute customer service and problem-solving skills to succeed under pressure. And those requirements, among others, continue to evolve.

For these reasons and more, snack leader Mondelez International Inc. and Endeavor Business Media, publisher of *Automatic Merchandiser* and *VendingMarketWatch.com*, teamed up in 2021 to sponsor the Route Driver of the Year contest. This recognition program puts the spotlight on the hardworking route professionals, who remain the backbone of the vending, micro market and office coffee service industry.

Mauser, the winner of the latest contest, is a nine-year veteran of the BostonbeaN Coffee Co. of Woburn, MA. BostonbeaN is mainly an office coffee service operation, and provides snacks, cold drinks, water and fresh food by delivery. The company is planning to deploy its first smart coolers this year to complement its OCS and pantry businesses.

"COVID struck workplaces hard in Boston," said BostonbeaN vice president Steve Serino, who nominated the winner. "BostonbeaN provides strictly to the workplace



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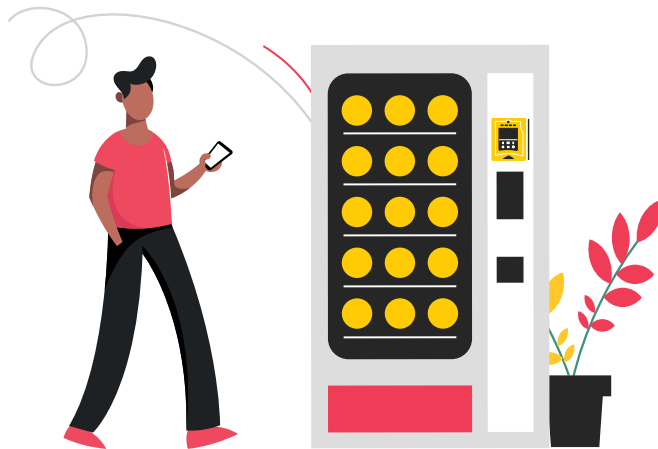
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Future-proof

and only provides breakroom solutions that are offered to employees at no cost. With so few employees back in the office and many reluctant to come back, Kamden was able to leverage his strong relationships with clients to convince them to offer additional and higher-end amenities to help entice employees to come back.”

At BostonbeaN, drivers are not only delivery personnel, but they are also account managers. “This was our philosophy from the start,” Serino said. “But Kam really listened and drove the message home. As a result, his route showed the highest sales of any. Coffee only represented 19% of his total sales over the past few months while pre-COVID, it represented 55%.”

BostonbeaN still has a long way to go to return to 2019 sales, Serino told *Automatic Merchandiser*. But if the company’s route team can rival some of Mauser’s success, it will close in on that pre-COVID benchmark soon. Mauser estimates that his route has already recovered about 70% of pre-pandemic sales.

“When the pandemic hit, it was a big challenge for us,” Mauser said. “Literally, overnight, our business changed.” On March 14, 2020, in fact, BostonbeaN went from full speed to almost a complete stop overnight. As offices emptied, the operator first had to address what to do with product on location, on its trucks and in the warehouse.

“We gave away products that would have expired,” Mauser recalled. “We went to police stations, fire departments and hospitals. We installed kegerators to provide free cold brew and we gave away all our perishables. And when some accounts started to reopen their offices a little, bringing in essential workers first, we started offering them more beverage, snack and food options...companies were eager to invest more to reward those employees. And as time went on further, we began presenting more options to clients to help them entice workers back...that still goes on now.”

BostonbeaN serves numerous accounts in Massachusetts’ technology corridor, which runs along the 55-plus-mile Boston beltway that is Route 128 known as “America’s Technology Highway.” The high number of technology firms in the area had been a great market for an OCS provider like BostonbeaN, and more recently for pantry services.

Serino describes the company’s pantry program, which it formalized as a business division eight years ago, as a “white-glove service” offering high-quality snacks, cold drinks and even fresh food that can be tailored to each customer’s need. Whereas BostonbeaN’s coffee sales have started to enjoy a strong comeback, its pantry service, which was booming pre-pandemic in the technology sector, is returning at a slower pace. “Technology companies have been much more cautious about bringing their employees back,” Serino observed.

Where OCS Thrived

Massachusetts has a long history of being a central hub for technology companies and medical labs. The state gave birth to several industries and is, perhaps, the birthplace of the American industrial revolution itself. In the early 1900s, area scientists, inventors, businessmen and investors were focusing on the new field of electrical sciences. Research labs at Harvard and M.I.T., among other institutions, contributed to R&D growth. World War II provided the biggest boost to dozens of Massachusetts companies doing research and development. In fact, Boston became a source of scientific and technological talent to the war-related industries and changed from a “mill-based” to “mind-based” economy. In recent decades, Boston firms took the lead in software design, computer architecture, data processing and biomedical technologies. As a result, area banks created high-technology investment companies. This robust high-tech economy created a perfect opportunity for Boston’s convenience services pioneers like BostonbeaN.

“Our tech clients can easily telecommute,” Mauser added. “Many of their employees can work from home.” So as the workforce pivoted from offices to homes, BostonbeaN pivoted its business to serve its patrons at home.

“We had to leverage our relationships with clients,” Mauser said. So, the route driver and Serino developed a care package delivery program for remote employees and the idea resonated with many of their clients. “It was a win-win for our clients,” Mauser said. “It accomplished two things for our clients; it kept them, and us, in contact with their employees and makes those employees feel good about their company.”

The care package program was brisk for a while. Serino himself helped with deliveries, sometimes spending a whole day delivering packages in Boston and its surrounding towns.

Both BostonbeaN-ers agreed that making those deliveries was extremely fun. “It allowed us to maintain some contact with our customers,” Mauser said. “We leaned on our strong relationships to make them even stronger. And then customers started calling me, asking ‘can you get PPE, masks, hand sanitizer? How about toilet paper?’ And we were able to get some of that during the shortages.”

Pre-pandemic, some of Mauser’s clients would order annually a about quarter million dollars’ worth of breakroom supplies. But during the first year of the pandemic, facing a total loss, some of those clients ended up spending at least half that amount on BostonbeaN’s care package service. “To be able to provide a solution like that to our customers is fantastic. It solidified our many customer relationships. It was a challenging time, but fun, too,” said the Route Driver of the Year. ■



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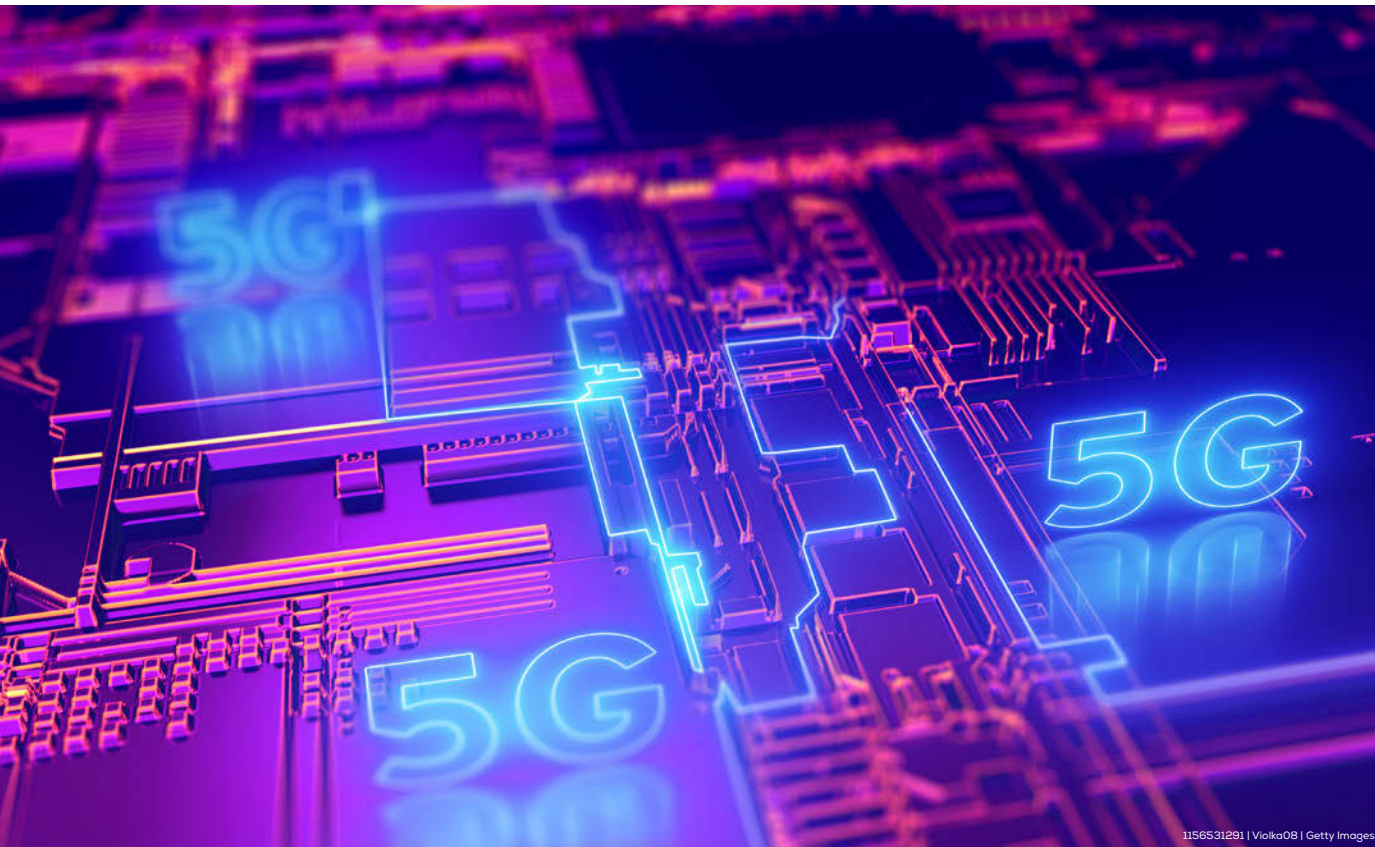
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From 3G to 4G to 5G and Beyond

How cellular connectivity is powering
self-checkout and vending

By Brian Gill

IT'S IMPORTANT TO HAVE THE

right connectivity to support your digital transformation. Relying on

Wi-Fi or an on-premises network that you don't own and manage yourself can limit your ability to control what is happening and how quickly you can respond if the connection goes down. Many operators find themselves needing a quick, reliable and

secure way to connect, and many are turning to cellular as their best option.

As the cellular carriers roll out the new and enhanced 5G network, they will be turning off older 2G and 3G networks that will cause many operators to lose connectivity. This article takes a full look at the changing landscape of cellular connectivity and what operators need to do to keep

their equipment connected while also highlighting what will be possible in the future with enhancements of the 5G network.

5G AND ITS BENEFITS

The term 5G stands for "fifth generation." The wireless industry adopted the standards for 5G in 2017. Since



33614937 | Anadi Bojarsinov | Dreamstime

that time, the major cell carriers and cellphone manufacturers have been developing the infrastructure and the products that can support 5G.

However, the appeal of 5G is much more than just the improvements in speed we will see with our cellphones. This is because 5G offers significantly more bandwidth for more devices and will allow for upload and download speeds that are much faster, all with less latency and more reliable than the current 4G LTE. All carriers are advertising their 5G networks, however, not all 5G technology is the same.

5G is a great opportunity for developers to deploy applications that take advantage of fast, high-speed lower latency networks. Like any data network, people want to know what the advantages are going to be of this new technology. So, let's look at what specifically will be possible with 5G.

KILLER SPEEDS

If you are close enough to one of these 5G towers with your 5G phone, you will be able to download entire episodes of HD programs in a matter of seconds. Buffering when viewing a video will be a thing of the past.

LESS TOWER CONGESTION

With current 4G LTE technology, when thousands of people descend on a small area, towers tend to get congested and reach capacity. On 5G, this will no longer be an issue. This means that people won't feel like they are competing against each other for the tower using their cellphone on internet-based activities like streaming content with all the other users at crowded venues like airports, sporting events and concerts.

With more bandwidth available, people will also be able to use this bandwidth to do more with their devices, making them more versatile than ever before.

5G offers significantly more bandwidth for more devices and will allow for upload and download speeds that are much faster, all with less latency and more reliable than the current 4G LTE.

NEW TECHNOLOGY OPTIONS

As network speeds have increased, more and more tasks are being transitioned from the world of computers to the world of smart devices. With the increasing network speeds, this could open new doors for smart device technology that may not have been available. We're talking AI (artificial intelligence), VR (virtual reality), and much more.

When 4G LTE first emerged, people were blown away by the speed and capabilities of such an advanced network. With 4G, LTE came with more rich content, from video streaming to live gaming. The introduction of 5G will allow for enhanced innovation and new capabilities that weren't previously possible.

2G/3G SHUTDOWN

With 4G's increasing growth and 5G already being rolled out in larger metropolitan areas, network operators' focus has been shifting away from legacy technologies like 3G. The move away from 3G will undoubtedly be a significant transition for many IoT and M2M companies, because 2G and 3G connectivity is still widely used for deployed devices.

T-Mobile is retiring the Sprint 3G network on March 31, 2022. Between now and that date when the Sprint network is fully decommissioned, capacity and coverage may change. As the cellular carriers roll out the new and enhanced 5G network, they will

be turning off older 2G and 3G networks that will cause many operators to lose connectivity prior to the official sunset date.

This means that the time for planning and figuring out how to upgrade your older 2G/3G devices is now. It is important to have a plan in place, especially for organizations that have a large portfolio of devices that need to be upgraded.

KEEPING EQUIPMENT CONNECTED

As adoption grows and the carriers invest more and more resources into new technology, IoT will continue to expand and be an even larger part of all our lives. Understanding the need and having a strategic plan in place to upgrade older devices is important to you and your business so that you don't face service interruptions or downtime.

An integral part of this plan will be upgrading your 2G/3G equipment to 4G/5G so that it continues to have connectivity once the cellular carriers sunset their older network. The carriers have acknowledged that service may be reduced in areas as they upgrade towers from 2G/3G to 5G.

As the carriers continue to transition older equipment to 5G, coverage will be reduced and older devices may not work, even before the deadlines. It's best to get started now so that your equipment doesn't lose connectivity and functionality. ■

About the author



Brian Gill is 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 or (315) 542-7875.

Weekly Reporting

Custom Data Solutions advances alongside the rapidly evolving vending trade

By Nick Montano, Editor



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THE NATION'S LEADING DATA COLLECTION, PROCESSING and reporting firm is advancing its methods and systems in leaps and bounds, which will have a positive impact on the vending industry. Two years ago, Custom Data Solutions Inc. began producing weekly reports that show sales of all consumer packaged goods by segment, state and region, among other details, for its CPG supplier customers. In full effect, this new reporting system provided relative sales data for 2021, compared with 2020 and 2019.

As a result, CPG companies working with CDSI were able to modify their sales approaches precisely to what was happening in the vending channel, according to CDSI president and chief executive Michael Nudi. "Reporting helped management fully understand what was happening in the channel," he said. "Our team worked diligently to create reports and made adjustments based on feedback."

Custom Data Solutions' enhanced reporting, started March 2020 at the onset of the pandemic, is a weekly snapshot of the vending channel's performance. The outbound reports use consolidated data across all CPG clients showing percentage changes from one period to the next. Due to confidentiality concerns, reports only show consolidated percentage changes. Much of the data reported to Custom Data Solutions is delivered daily.

This year, CDSI is developing a new web-based reporting system. It will be the company's fifth-generation web

application, built on the newest reporting tools and technologies available.

"CDSI was the first to embrace that 'new-fangled' thing called the 'internet' as we developed and released our first-generation web-based reporting solution in 1999," Nudi recalled. "Thinking back to that time, people were still using modems and plugging in their landline telephones to connect to the internet. It was slow, but it was well-ahead of the information curve where CDSI has always been."

Founded as a software company in 1981, CDSI began developing technology to analyze snack food data in 1994. In the early days, reports were generated quarterly, later advancing to a monthly rate. Today, CDSI provides much of the reporting for the vending channel, or "convenience services" to use the National Automatic Merchandising Association's vernacular. CPG data analytics giant IRI, on the other hand, does not have direct visibility to the vending channel, so it cannot provide CPG suppliers with

“Vending is truly a pioneer business model that evolves quickly to changing trends and moves away from declining trends faster than any other trade class.”



Michael Nudi

the same direct operator/retailer purchase reporting that Custom Data Solutions can.

IRI data are like report cards that monitor past actions, according to Nudi, and do not meet the requirements of a trade class like vending that has fluid distribution. "In vending, the decision points are much more varied to the many operator/retailers' headquarters, the route drivers and even the consumer preferences at the machine's location level," he explained. "There is a constant review occurring at several levels requiring near real-time visibility."

To accomplish this CDSI has developed a unique identifier, or the "CDSId," for each operator; no matter where they purchase their products, they are linked to the common identifier. Additionally, a product broker that represents multiple CPG products will see the same CDSId across any CPG to which they have access.

"The definition of vending has really changed over the past 10 years or so," Nudi said. "It is no longer just the glassfront vending machine." CDSI's reporting is now organized under numerous segments. Today's vending segment comprises traditional vending machines, self-checkout micro markets, fundraising and concessions. Other CDSI segments include theaters, correctional facilities and specialty/alternate markets, as well as some parts of hospitality, campus retail, and travel and leisure. The specialty/alternate segment could include such retail venues as Lowes, Home Depot, Michaels, Bed Bath & Beyond, Auto Zone and Fastenal.

"Sales in each of these segments go hand in hand with the segments of business that the vend distributors have evolved into over the years," Nudi explained. Today, the vending and specialty/alternate segments, combined, represent more than 88% of the convenience services business, Nudi reported.

Interestingly, sales in the correctional segment, a relatively small market, never slowed during the pandemic. In fact, sales there continued to increase throughout the COVID crisis, even surpassing 2019's levels. "Inmates really love their snacks," Nudi concluded.

CDSI can also provide incentive program data. These marketing programs allow the operator/retailer to earn points or rebates for their purchases. In 2020, CDSI calculated and disbursed more than \$51 million in rebates for its CPG clients. "This does not include the rebates paid by CPGs where we do not do the calculation, although they use our data as the primary source for these payments," Nudi noted.

"Vending is truly a pioneer business model that evolves quickly to changing trends and moves away from declining trends faster than any other trade class," Nudi said. "Timely reporting magnifies the growth potential for CPG suppliers, product distributors, brokers and operators. Data is essential to maximizing assets and returns for all concerned." ■

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Change and innovation are leading the convenience services industry to reimagine its future, and NAMA is showcasing these opportunities at The NAMA Show 2022, April 6-8, 2022, at Chicago's McCormick Place.

The all-new "Imagination Way," an immersive, hands-on gallery teeming with tomorrow's technologies and solutions, is an experience in itself. This interactive gallery puts the edgiest emerging technologies and service solutions on display and in the hands of attendees.

Imagination Way will showcase products, equipment, best practices, technology and merchandising tactics in real-world retail scenarios, demonstrating how these innovations may be leveraged in four unique consumer venues. NAMA has invited dozens of potential new customers from these industries to visit Imagination Way and attend The NAMA Show 2022:

- Transit/Transport Centers
- Multi-Family/Campus Housing
- Senior Living/Healthcare
- Hotel/Lodging and Hospitality

Attendees will be encouraged to put new solutions to the test while exploring their application in fully functional displays. Experts will help attendees imagine how new



features can be applied to existing operations, or how operations can be expanded to serve more customers in new venues and channels. An enhanced New Product Zone, where manufacturers will premiere the latest offerings to wow customers and increase sales, is also part of this area.

As of mid-February, Retail 365 Markets, Cantaloupe, Kellogg's, Keurig Dr. Pepper, Kiosoft, Mondelēz International, Popshop, Three Square Market and Vistar

have committed to participate in Imagination Way.

Imagination Way is situated at the entrance to the exhibit hall at The NAMA Show 2022, ensuring every convenience services operator and all of their customers attending the event will engage with leading-edge technologies and service offerings.

Education, Trade Show and Networking

Beyond Imagination Way, curated knowledge, an expansive trade show and peer-to-peer networking round out the event.

The NAMA Show offers dozens of education sessions delivered by leading minds in the convenience services industry.

An expansive trade show will feature displays from hundreds of companies representing the full range of products and services, including transformational technologies to help operators automate many aspects of their businesses such as self-service kiosks and payment solutions; advanced machinery; the latest candy, snacks, and beverages; and a range of professional services to help convenience services businesses operate more efficiently.

The tradeshow floor is the prime venue for networking. Receptions, such as those for the Women in Industry and the Emerging Leaders Network, provide more targeted networking forums.

Register Today!

The NAMA Show 2022 is the largest event for the convenience services industry and is designed for operators and professionals in the micro market, vending, pantry, coffee/tea/water service and unattended retail sectors of the convenience services industry. Register online today at www.thenamashow.org.

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Pantry Service

Starting – or restarting – your program to welcome back workers, one snack at a time

By Scott Voisin

BEFORE THE PANDEMIC, PANTRY service was a fast-growing segment in workplace refreshments. That came to an abrupt stop when many of the nation's businesses pivoted to remote work amid extended stay-at-home orders. But now that people are returning to offices in greater numbers, employers are looking for new and creative ways to make work more fun and retain employees in a historically tight labor market.

One approach to keep employees happy is to subsidize snack and beverage amenities on work premises. While the practice of employers providing free refreshments to employees is not new, many are now prioritizing subsidies for generous snack and beverage programs. With demand for workplace benefits mounting, there's never been a better time for operators to add pantry services to complement their micro markets, vending and office coffee solutions.

Here are some tips from leading operators and product suppliers on how to start – or restart – a pantry service in 2022.

MAKE SNACKS THE MAIN ATTRACTION

Judson Kleinman, the founder and chief executive of Parsippany, NJ's Corporate Essentials LLC, believes pantry service can play a strategic

part in luring employees back to the workplace while also having a positive impact on a company's culture. "For many of our clients, the pantry really is the centerpiece of the office," he said. "When our office clients welcome visitors, they don't show them the whole office. They say, rather, 'This is where our snacks are.'"



Judson Kleinman

However, for organizations installing a pantry program, Kleinman cautions against going too big too fast. "I liken it to a kid in a candy store," he explained. "You don't want to give them everything all at once. I think it's good to have a little bit of an offering and then every 30 days add something else. That way, when people come into work, they're like, 'Oh, wow, look, we have something new.' It keeps it fresh and exciting. I think that's really important to focus on."

HOST A SAMPLING EVENT

Kimberly Lenz, director of foodservice sales and procurement at San Francisco's Associated



Kimberly Lenz

Services, recommends product sampling events for micro market and vending operators looking to add

pantry service. Lenz often schedules product samplings to maintain enthusiasm for her clients' pantry offerings.

"Our customers love to see, taste and try new snacking products," she said. "We can make recommendations, but it doesn't have the same impact as when they can actually hold it in their hands and try it themselves."

COVID-19, however, has altered how Lenz can propose new offerings. "Pre-pandemic, we would sit in a kitchen and open up a bunch of different samples for employees to try," she said. "Two years into the pandemic, people are still social distancing and remain wary of sharing stuff, so we've been sending samples to offices rather than delivering them ourselves. It's been a different way of doing things, but we're still getting positive feedback from it."



We try to educate people through labeling and signage on what items they already have that conform to the trend."

Kimberly Lenz

STAY ON TREND

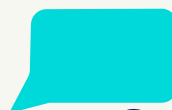
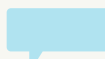
Snack variety is essential in a pantry, which includes healthier alternatives to traditional cookies, pastries and candy. Located in the Bay Area of California, Lenz is in a great position to be on the forefront of consumers' ever-changing dietary trends.

2022

Explore specialty
drinks like kombucha



Host a
sampling event



Rotate in new snacks
to generate interest



START

“As soon as we start to see a trend, we try to learn about it and identify what snacks we have that already fit within it,” she said. “Gluten-free, vegan was huge for a while but now it’s keto, and you don’t want to convert everything in the pantry and reset the product mix. We try to educate people through labeling and signage on what items they already have that conform to the trend.”

LOOK BEYOND SNACKS

The latest fads aren’t just limited to snacks. “Over the past several years, specialty coffee – especially local roasters – has been huge,” she said. “There’s so much innovation right now. There are prebiotic drinks, probiotic, kombucha and tonics. Now we’re starting to see more requests for things like Olipop and other unique beverages. Those are the kinds of drinks being

offered to try and bring people back to the office and create some excitement.”

Occasionally, Lenz has seen products stocked in pantries that are brought in from outside sources. While some might view that as an area of concern, she has found it to be a positive experience.

“We’ve been introduced to a lot of really great snacks from our customers,” she said. “It’s typically something local, and if it’s high volume and we think we can offer it to other customers, we’ll start to bring it on for them. In other situations, sometimes it’s an item we don’t want to provide, either because the volume’s not there or we don’t have a good source to get it. In that case, we’ll assign a shelf on their fridge, or we’ll give them one bin on the snack rack. The relationship is the most important aspect with our custom-

ers, so maintaining that relationship is important.”

GAUGE INTEREST

When it comes to attitudes toward pantry service, there are three categories into which companies fall: those that are sure they want it; those



Tammy Stokes

that don’t; and those trying to decide if pantry service is right for them. Tammy Stokes, vice president of refreshment

services at Five Star Food Service, uses a combination of data and promotions to help the decision-making process.

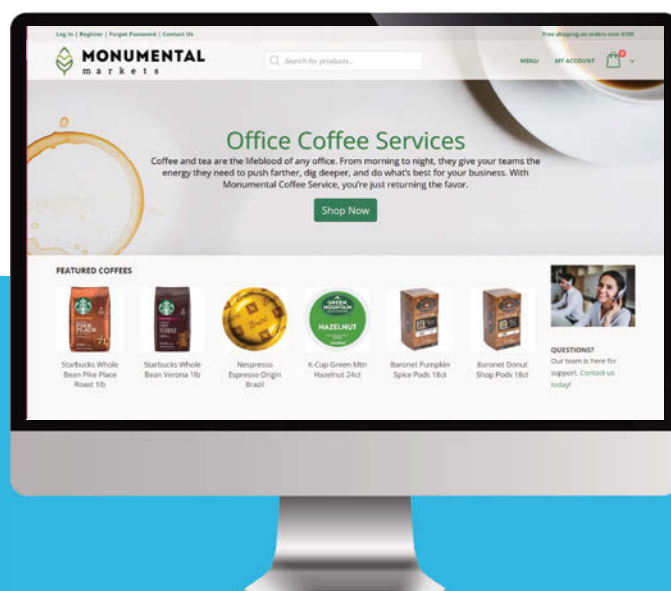
“We have to educate the client and get them to understand what’s going on in their market and the overall industry,” she said. “You need to look at the client’s competitors and what they’re



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doing, and then you can be a good consultant and perhaps offer some best practices to bring snacks, food and pantry in as a culture changer.”

Stokes recalled recently installing a pantry in a company that was bringing back workers for the first time since the pandemic began. “They had never had pantry and snacks before,” she said. “We kept it limited in the beginning; about eight SKUs crossing those day points for them while their café was shut down. We did a huge reopening and were on site with the coffee, cold brew and snacks, and we also did giveaways. We asked our [product] broker community and manufacturing partners to kick in and give these employees a huge welcome back in the lobby every day. I think when you’re trying to convince a client on the benefits of pantry service, you’ve got to be there, and you’ve got to get engaged.”

OFFER SUBSTANCE

Some businesses are looking for more substance from their pantry providers than just quick snacks and beverages. “Several of our customers want to provide a meal replacement,” Stokes explained. “We have actually opened up a program we call Pick Two. The employee can pick two pantry items – sandwiches, wraps, salads, parfaits, bistro boxes, veggie cups, things like that – from a cold cooler, and then they can pick two dry snacks for the day along with two beverages. They get that choice every single day.”

However, the advantages of Five Star’s Pick Two program don’t end there. “There’s a leftover cooler where fresh food pieces get emptied into every day,” Stokes noted. “The employees get to take those items home, and that’s a huge benefit right now in the pandemic for their families and for

people who need food at home. Any leftovers that aren’t taken home are then donated to charity. I think we’re going to see a lot of this and we’re going to be tested and challenged from an operator perspective to answer the needs. All of that was developed just by listening to the customer and really trying to create a program that wasn’t in our wheelhouse.”

TALK TO A PRODUCT BROKER

As a product broker, Michael Kelley, national account project manager of Burdette Beckmann Inc., fulfills multiple roles in the creation and

maintenance of a pantry service.

He advises any operator considering breaking into pantry service to work closely



Michael Kelley

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with their broker on product and supply strategies.

“Brokers are an extension of our supplier partners in the field,” he observed. “We are consultants to the operator, supplier and distributors, and we provide them with product knowledge and category information to help them make better selections for their pantries, vending and micro markets.”

Given their position in the industry, brokers like Kelley are uniquely qualified to enable businesses to make informed decisions. “Our main goal is to be a consultant with our clients, and we’re able to provide them with the data that we receive from the manufacturer,” he said. “With the supply chain issues that are going on right now, we must be very selective on products that we’re recommending, so we really rely on the information that is provided by the suppliers. We’re

also able to see the trends not only on a national basis, but a regional basis, as well, so it’s helpful in making best practices for the clients.”

STUDY THE DEMOGRAPHICS

Just like micro markets, vending or office coffee, running a successful pantry service begins with understanding demographics of a location. “There are massive differences between the generations,” explained Malcolm McAlpine, business manager of branded snacks and confections at Mondelēz International Vending. “Boomers snack to reward themselves, Gen X to boost their mood, millennials are finding comfort and Gen Z to relieve boredom. Different snacks resonate with different age groups, and you have to think very carefully about having the right mix of products for the consumers.”



[Brokers] are consultants to the operator, supplier and distributors, and we provide them with product knowledge and category information to help them make better selections for their pantries, vending and micro markets.”

Michael Kelley

Although preferences vary by generation, there should be one common element in a pantry’s contents: it must offer nationally recognized brands.

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According to Nielsen data, the sale of branded snacks surged 9% during the pandemic while private-label foods decreased by the same margin. In times of uncertainty, McAlpine observed, these data suggest that people gravitate toward known and familiar products.

"If you're going to put a cookie in a pantry, it should be an Oreo," he advised. "It's the biggest selling cookie in the world. And if you're going to offer a cheese cracker, you've got to have Cheez-It."

FOSTER SAFETY

As people return to the workplace, concerns about COVID will linger. Apprehensions about safety within an office extend to the pantry. "Exposed fresh food is not welcome anymore," McAlpine said. "A safe environment is imperative. Low-

contact, low-touch options are going to be preferred. Offering prepackaged and sealed sandwiches, salads and branded snacks is really, really important."

With so many moving parts vital to the success of a pantry service, the 30-year CPG marketing veteran said that data are the only metric that can truly be relied on.

"I always quote W. Edwards Deming: 'Without data, you're just another person with an opinion,'" McAlpine said. "When you're building a planogram, you should build it around data-driven category management information to make sure it's stacked with the snacks the employees want. There is so much information out there. Reach out to your broker, to your salesperson and to your manufacturer, and make your decisions based upon the data."

Whereas data are valuable tools when designing a program, it's communication with the client that could turn a good pantry into a great one. "Be open to feedback," McAlpine urged. "Although pantry products are being given away to employees, they're still consumers and your client is still paying for them. Be open to the positive and negative feedback, listen closely and act accordingly." ■



About the author

Scott Voisin has been a freelance writer for more than 20 years. In addition to *Automatic Merchandiser*, his work has been featured in nationally distributed magazines such as *Racing Milestones*, *GameRoom*, *The Phantom of the Movies*, *VideoScope* and *Autograph Collector*. He is also the author of the book series, *Character Kings: Hollywood's Familiar Faces Discuss the Art and Business of Acting*.

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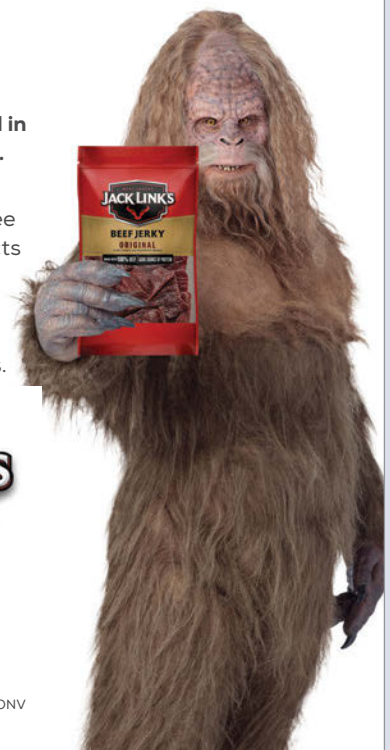
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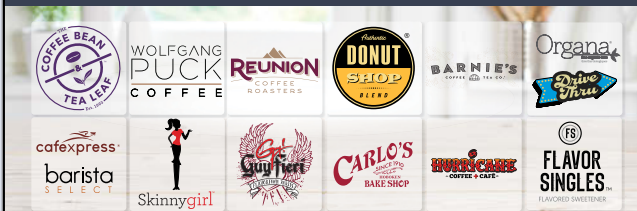
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Rules and guidelines


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- » Nominations from all industry segments and allied markets are welcome. These include operators, product and equipment distributors, product brokers, machine manufacturers, technology and payment system providers, CPG companies, and trade associations, among others.
- » Please limit submissions to two (2) women per company or organization.
- » Submitting party(ies) acknowledge that all information presented is truthful to the best of their knowledge.
- » Submission forms must be completed. Incomplete and/or incorrect submissions cannot be considered.

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How Seattle's office coffee pioneer survived COVID's devastating blow to emerge stronger than ever

*By Emily Cambriello,
Contributing Editor*

Uncompromising Service Accelerates Pot O' Gold's Rebound





Photos by Pot O' Gold Coffee Service

A S TOUGH AS THESE EXTRAORDINARY times have been for office coffee service, one operator has managed to acquire 120-plus new customers since the start of the pandemic and is poised for the rebound to pick up pace with the start of the new year.

Serving the greater Seattle area, Bellevue, WA's Pot O' Gold Coffee Service was one of the hard-hit OCS providers, with sales plummeting 80% at the lowest point. However, the OCS operation is now making a steady comeback, recapturing 60% of 2019's pre-pandemic sales level in the third quarter of 2021 with sales growing daily.

Second-generation operator Blake Jones attributes much of the company's recent growth in new accounts to its competitors not maintaining prior service levels and standards, and others who were forced to close shop and leave the market.

“

The fact that we are actually at 60% pre-COVID right now is attributed mostly from the 120-plus new customers we have acquired during the pandemic.”

Blake Jones

“A lot of our competitors let their service fall short, and hence people wanted a change and we ended up acquiring new customers that we were pursuing pre-COVID,” he said. “We never faltered on service; it's what our business was built upon. Even with the smallest accounts and Pot O' Gold staff that was down to just one employee and me at the height of the shutdown, we rotated products and

even bettered our procedures because of COVID by sanitizing machines and leaving a dated sanitization sticker.”

While some OCS pundits question whether office populations in markets like Seattle and New York City, among other metro areas, will ever return to pre-pandemic levels, Jones is decidedly optimistic given the trend so far – even in the face of continued threats like omicron and other possible variants.

“The fact that we are actually at 60% pre-COVID right now is attributed mostly from the 120-plus new customers we have acquired during the pandemic,” Jones reported. “We are now expecting those new customers, along with our pre-COVID customer base, to begin to return to their offices the first part of 2022. We are hopeful that combined, we will then see pre-COVID numbers.”

THE EARLY DAYS

The second-generation enterprise was founded by Blake’s father, Larry, in 1986, with the dream of providing the very best coffee, equipment and service in the office. Since then, the company has grown to stake its claim as the largest independent office coffee service provider in Washington and has expanded to offer much more than coffee.

Larry had worked with his father and brother in their vending machine business when he noticed what it lacked was quality coffee and equipment to rival the Seattle coffeehouses that put specialty coffee on the world map and conditioned consumers to raise their standard daily brews.


So, alongside his family’s vending operation, Larry started Pot O’ Gold




Larry Jones at an espresso catering event in the 1990s.

Coffee Service, installing and servicing commercial coffee brewing equipment in offices throughout Seattle.

Larry got creative to fund his fledgling company’s growth. Alaskan king crab fishing was in its heyday, so he took to the open seas nine months out of the year while his brother oversaw his coffee accounts in his absence. Business grew, and for 12 years, Larry split his time between fishing and returning home to continue to build and support Pot O’ Gold.




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“He then shifted his focus from trying to be the biggest at what Pot O’ Gold did to being the best at what it did,” Jones observed. “He was a pioneer in bringing specialty coffee to the office, which separated Pot O’ Gold from the OCS pack. There were also far fewer competitors than there are today.”

Pot O’ Gold founder Larry Jones prepares trap on his crab boat. During the heyday of Alaskan king crab fishing, Jones split his time between the open seas and starting up an office coffee service route.

The younger Jones helped in the family business throughout high school and college and learned the ropes by working in the warehouse and making deliveries. He graduated from the University of Oregon in 2016 and came aboard full time, primarily focusing on sales.

THE STARBUCKS TOUCH

What really put Pot O’ Gold on the map was Larry’s decision in 2002 to provide the first Starbucks Interactive Cup bean-to-cup machine, or I-Cup, in workplace environments.

“It was revolutionary and was the right time and right place, being in

Seattle, the land of specialty coffee and Starbucks,” said Jones. “Starbucks used us as a test company. That got us known and we still place some I-Cups in smaller accounts, which don’t need the larger touchscreen machines in demand today.”

Jones serves on Starbucks’ Workplace Advisory Council of independent office coffee service operators from across the country. In fact, Pot O’ Gold still has the most I-Cups placed in the U.S. than any other operator.

The company’s warm reception to and operational success with the I-Cup led Pot O’ Gold to expand its equipment offerings to other makes and models that served up authentic bean-to-cup coffee and specialty drinks like cappuccinos, mochas and espressos. Pot O’ Gold also expanded its coffee variety and today carries

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a selection from 30 different roasters, most of which are Seattle-based, providing the local feel most of its customers seek.

Touchless solutions for both coffee and water equipment emerged and became extremely popular during the beginning stages of the pandemic but

demand for them has now dropped significantly.

“We don’t count on the demand in the future, but touchless options will always be in our arsenal,” Jones commented. “It is a nice feature to have. However, most customers that are offered this technology decide

not to adopt it since there is an extra charge. A lot of customers with touchless kits are not renewing their touchless packages.”

Whole bean coffee and bean-to-cup brewers make up the majority of Pot O’ Gold’s business, but thermal brewers also remain extremely popular, as do single-cup portion-pack brewers from Keurig and Nespresso.

“For thermal brewers, we offer both ground coffee and fraction packs, but a majority of our customers receive bulk, ground coffee,” Jones noted. “At the end of the day, offices here in Seattle prefer fresh, full city-roasted, local coffees.”

“

The good news is many see pantry service as important as ever, if not even more so, to entice employees back and keep them working in the office.”

Blake Jones

THE PANTRY EDGE

Pantry service was a big growth area for Pot O’ Gold before the pandemic shut down many offices and is picking up steam again as employers seek to incentivize their workforces to return to the office.

Pot O’ Gold was among the trailblazers to provide the pantry service model in the Pacific Northwest when it emerged as an expansion of coffee service a decade ago to incentivize employees to stay onsite and reward them by providing more than just coffee and the related basics. For Pot O’ Gold, that has included everything from snacks and cold beverages to

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“One big change since the pandemic is no more bulk snack bins; there’s been a shift to individual packages on racks,” Jones pointed out. “The good news is many see pantry service as important as ever, if not even more so, to entice employees back and keep them working in the office. If employees can get snacks on site, there’s no real reason to leave the building. It’s a positive move regarding productivity. But it also is a great way of showing appreciation to employees.

According to Jones, companies in the tech sector have been one of the largest adopters of pantry service. In the tech sector, where employee retention is crucial, companies are considering more amenities like pantry service a perk to workers. “They’re offering their employees everything under the sun,” Jones said.

SKY’S THE LIMIT

Pot O’ Gold continually strives to add more enticing and on-trend products to its menu, including, for example, plant-based milks that are all the rage. Likewise, the company rarely removes products from its pantry menu and takes it a step further by accommodating special-order items that are not in its catalog. From coffee, to water, to snacks, Pot O’ Gold has a uniquely suited program to meet each office, regardless of the size and preferences.

“Pantry customers that are the easiest for us to work with are those that allow us the freedom to always introduce variety,” Jones emphasized. “They appreciate spontaneity and allow us freedom to mix it up. We get that people are always trying to be healthier. Focusing on always incorporating healthy food and beverage additions to our offerings is our main goal with our pantry snack service.”

Logistically, Pot O’ Gold runs its pantry service on the same route as its

OCS accounts, but the operator is considering revisiting this service model.

“A majority of our pantry service accounts, if not all, also utilize our office coffee service,” Jones explained. “Our drivers are trained to not only deliver coffee and coffee-related products and restock and service the coffee

equipment, but also to restock and maintain the snack bins.”

Pot O’ Gold’s pantry service accounts, however, require significantly more service and attention than its OCS locations. While many of its OCS accounts are on a bimonthly delivery schedule, many of its pantry

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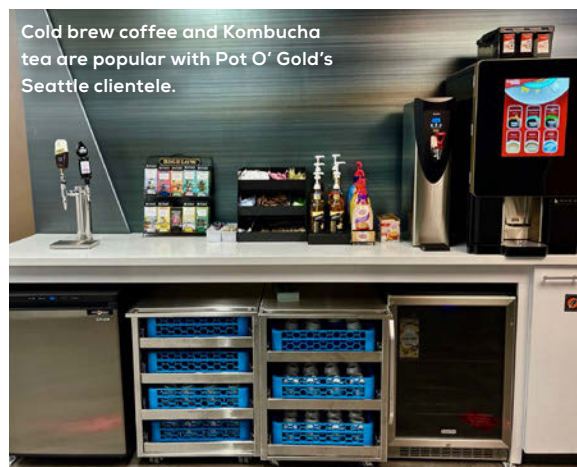
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Pot O' Gold Coffee Service team members gather for a company photo outside of the company's Bellevue, WA, facility.



Pot O' Gold installation features Bevi's countertop smart water dispenser.



Cold brew coffee and Kombucha tea are popular with Pot O' Gold's Seattle clientele.



Pot O' Gold takes pride in offering breakrooms a wide range of commercial appliances, including an alcohol keg, pictured here.

locations require weekly service at a minimum and in many cases as frequent as two to three times per week.

"It can be tedious and time-consuming to restock their snack shelving/bins and fridges," Jones noted. "We are beginning to realize that this should be handled by two people for speed and efficiency resulting in greater customer satisfaction."

BOTTOMS UP!

Expanding its repertoire into a whole new refreshment category, Pot O' Gold was approved for a liquor license just as COVID-19 hit in early 2020. This added a much sought-after service among its customer base and a new revenue stream that has already proven to be a big sales contributor.

"A lot of big customers say they're returning to the office in January and February and they're adding more to

“

Pot O' Gold is able to help our clients by providing 'green' solutions for everything in the breakroom. We can provide tools to help educate them and their employees on why this is important."

Blake Jones

incentivize their employees to return and stay in the office, and we are now even more of a one-stop shop," Jones said. "We bring happy hour to offices

with a list that includes beer, hard cider, hard seltzers, wine, and non-alcoholic cold brew, kombucha, draft and tea. We have kegs, cans or bottles."

Plumbed-in water filtration goes hand in hand with the coffee in most of Pot O' Gold's accounts, with the added attraction of the simplicity and convenience of dealing with one vendor. Oasis, Water Logic, and Follett are the company's coolers of choice, and Bevi and Elkay systems have met growing favor for sparkling and flavored waters.

Pot O' Gold has chosen thus far to focus only on office coffee and pantry services, referring micro market requests to a partner company. But that may change. Jones noted that social distancing, cafeteria closures and reduced onsite populations resulting from the pandemic proved even more opportunity for the already



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booming self-checkout stores and said Pot O' Gold will likely try its hand at operating them at some point further down the road.

SUSTAINABILITY FOCUSED

Even though they've had every opportunity to expand and grow to other parts of the Pacific Northwest, the Jones men are committed to keeping it local to the Puget Sound region.

Seattle has been a frontrunner in the sustainability movement. The region's composting and recycling infrastructure encourages and supports greener corporate environments to a level that many municipalities and operators are simply unable to provide just yet.

Pot O' Gold takes the lead in promoting sustainability in the workplace by offering its expertise to help clients convert products they purchase and procedures in their offices to reduce their carbon footprints.

"Pot O' Gold is able to help our clients by providing 'green' solutions for everything in the breakroom. We can provide tools to help educate them and their employees on why this is important," Jones commented. "We can help them determine what they're trying to accomplish by going green before making the decision to convert their products."

Pot O' Gold's solutions range from compostable paper products and utensils to environmentally sustainable snacks. Jones explained that can mean that the packaging is biodegradable or recyclable which means that it is sourced, manufactured, transported and recycled using renewable energy and maximizes the use of renewable or recycled source materials. The OCS company also chooses roasters that support sustainable operations that contribute to the success of small farming communities dedicated to growing the best beans possible,



OPERATION PROFILE

Pot O' Gold Coffee Service

Headquarters: Bellevue, WA

URL: potogoldcoffee.com

Founded: 1986

Owner(s): Larry Jones and
Blake Jones

No. of employees: 18

No. of routes: 7

Service radius: 35 Miles

Installed equipment: 1,710
coffee brewers and 665 water
coolers

No. of OCS/pantry accounts:
700+

Equipment providers: Bevi,
Bravilor, Bunn, Cafection, de
Jong Duke, Elkay, Follett, ION,
Kegco, Keurig, Micro Matic,
Nespresso, Newco, Oasis,
Waterlogic

Warehouse size: 10,000 sq.ft.

Fleet size: 12 vehicles

of which there's no shortage amid Seattle's artisan coffee culture.

Cedar Grove Composting plays a critical role in the Puget Sound's recycling infrastructure and sustainability efforts and all of the compostable products Pot O' Gold carries are Cedar Grove approved.

Another bonus to going green, Pot O' Gold informs its customers, is that organic recycling fees through a composting service like Cedar Grove are generally half of waste disposal service costs, and recycling is a non-taxable service. The City of Seattle charges a 14.2% city tax and a 3.6% state refuse tax for all garbage collection, but tax does not apply to organic wastes hauled by Cedar Grove.

THE BUYING-LOCAL ADVANTAGE

Like all operators, Pot O' Gold has been impacted by supply chain issues and shipping delays. But, thankfully, with Seattle being the coffee capital of America, sourcing locally roasted coffee is not only what most customers want, but it has not been a problem logistically.

"We try to carry mostly Seattle-based roasters," Jones said. "I haven't run into issues with these local roasters because our office is so close to them, and I also don't mind just driving to their location to pick up product if we are in a pinch."

Procuring coffee and other products that are not directly sourced from the manufacturer has posed greater challenges.

"For example, when I need to get coffee through a third-party shipper, I am having a hard time getting the product in time," Jones said. "Same goes for the powdered product for our bean-to-cup brewers. We are also experiencing issues with manufacturing and shipping delays on coffee equipment, especially bean-to-cup equipment manufactured outside of the country. We have been trying to stock-pile the bean-to-cup brewers and parts so we're ready to go when the larger accounts come back."

Likewise, it's become unpredictable whether many snacks and soft drinks are available from week to week. It's become the new norm for Pot O' Gold to let customers know their options to substitute similar products when their first choice is not available.

PRICING PRESSURES

Increased costs across the supply chain are another headwind on the road to recovery that all operators are facing. Coffee prices are at the highest they've been in 10 years.

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“The roasters have raised their prices, so we’ve been forced to do the same, penny for penny in most cases,” Jones noted. “With so many different sectors increasing their prices throughout COVID, it has been a pretty easy conversation to have with most of our customers, why it is essential for us to increase our coffee prices and price volatility of other products that is out of our control.”

Pot O’ Gold continues to closely monitor its cost of goods and adjust its prices accordingly.

“We are not the cheapest service in town. We pride ourselves on offering benefits to our own employees that are unrivaled in our industry, and this is reflected in the unparalleled service that we provide to our customers,” Jones reflected. “Our customers respect this and realize the value in what they are paying for. We have very

little customer turnover and have kept our employee benefit program intact 100% throughout COVID.”

LOYAL TEAM

Shortly after the pandemic shut down offices across the nation in March 2020, Pot O’ Gold had to let go most of its 20 employees. A testament to its dedication to its employees and their allegiance to Pot O’ Gold is that all have returned. It’s a close-knit team and some employees have been with the company for 25 years, Jones said. And Pot O’ Gold is gearing up to hire more team members to keep up with demand as more of its clients’ employees return to their offices.

“A lot of locations are looking to change their OCS provider because many of our competitors require minimums for their service. Since the pandemic, many locations have had

to reduce staff and consequently, the required minimums don’t make sense if the delivered minimums can’t be consumed,” Jones pointed out. “We don’t have minimums. We’ve told our customers who needed to temporarily shut down to just call us when they are back, and we’ll load them up with fresh product. Even with our smaller accounts during COVID, our drivers were coming in and rotating products. We continued providing the same great service, even with a skeleton staff.”

Numerous operators were forced to reduce staff and are now having a hard time hiring new ones, which has also led to a lower standard of service for many.

“We’ve taken on new business in part because many locations have had trouble getting a hold of an operator to provide service,” he said. “Even in the height of the pandemic, we responded



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to service calls within two hours. We jump on emails and phone calls whether there are 200 or 20 people in an office. We treat all our customers the same, with the best service we can provide. We champion our customers' needs, maintain quality relationships, and supply personal service recommendations uniquely suited to each individual client."

BLUE SKIES AHEAD

Since the end of summer of 2021, Pot O' Gold has seen a steady wave of its customers returning to the workplace, some full force and many still on a hybrid, partially remote model.

"We've seen a lot more people come back, and sales began climbing in early August as we took on new accounts every week," the operator commented. "If we have lost accounts, it's only because some accounts have closed their offices and terminated their leases."

Meanwhile, there has been new opportunity that had come out of that movement. Many companies that have remote employees still want a place where employees can mingle



Pot O' Gold established a home delivery service at the beginning of the pandemic.

and meet with clients and associates. Investors and developers are creating more coworking spaces for businesses with 100 people or less that don't want a lease but would rather pay a fee for a shared space.

"They're popping up around the city and they want office coffee and pantry service in their shared break rooms," he said. "There's a lot of new opportunity. We mostly get new business through word of mouth,

our website and Google. With the pandemic, it's been harder to get in front of people and we've used LinkedIn as a tool to connect with people and companies we'd like to do business with."

But doors are opening for more face-to-face interaction as more employees are returning to the office and based on the plans of many of his customers, the OCS veteran expects the momentum to continue to accelerate in the first quarter of 2022. ■

Marketplace

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in THE OFFICE



Ron Irwin
District Operation
Manager at Canteen
Vending

On February 14, 1977, I started as a vending mechanic at Servomation. Little did I know I would spend the next 45 years in the industry. Through mergers and acquisitions, I also worked for Service America, High Food Services and finally Canteen.

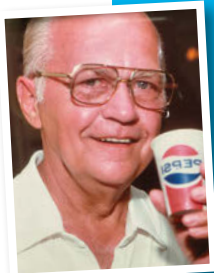


There have been many changes from the old pull-knob machines to the current high-tech vending machines and unattended retail markets. I will be retiring from Canteen on February 15. Canteen has been a great company to work for and gave me many opportunities for growth and advancement.



Shelley Brown Floyd
Executive Vice
President at Brown
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In the latest Making Our Mark Blog, we're celebrating culinarians from our LEAD (Leaders & Employees of African Descent) ERG, who share their personal stories and recipes as part of this month's Chef Spotlight series.

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