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They are Legend

This enterprising operation is looking to bring fresh perspectives to the industry as it continues to evolve into the 21st century.

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BREAKFAST

Up And At 'Em

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TOUCHLESS TECHNOLOGY

20 Months In

Needed or not, some clients expect touchless solutions in the COVID-era office breakroom. Operators must have options ready.

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They Are Legend

This enterprising operation is looking to bring fresh perspectives to the industry as it continues to evolve into the 21st century. Kyle Loughran, Nick Duda, Kevin Koehr and Ben Adams are the management team leading Legend Food Service

On the cover: Legend Food Service's executive management, from left, are Kyle Loughran, Nick Duda, Kevin Koehr and Ben Adams.

Margaret Strada for Legend Food Service

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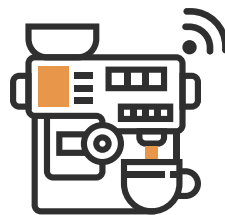
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Interviews, Expert Insight & Tips



OCS Operator

Why The NAMA Show was a superb display



Bob Tullio

BOB TULLIO'S TAKEAWAYS FROM THE NAMA SHOW ARE mostly positive. Bear in mind, this outlook comes from a guy who spent three hours presenting to six people in a room set up for 200. His optimism is driven by two factors: incredible New Orleans oysters (both raw and grilled) and what he saw on the show floor – innovation that will move the industry forward. See his video interviews online. VendingMarketWatch.com/21239217

Hourly hiring | Making it human

Hiring expert Kathleen Quinn Votaw says an hourly worker talent war is here. At any level in the worker hierarchy, however, there are only so many great people available. Once considered expendable, these workers, often in customer-facing roles, are instrumental to employers.



K.Q. Votaw

VendingMarketWatch.com/21238868

Data rescue | How IoT apps benefit cooler performance

Imagine if your refrigeration cabinets could provide data related to their performance. They could then provide you with needed information in real-time, so you can proactively address any issue. Minus Forty's marketing veep expounds on this possibility.



Randy Skyba

VendingMarketWatch.com/21239700

Special Report



Micro Market

Does your signage comply with best practices?



MICRO MARKET NEWS

The right signage can create customer loyalty, build brand awareness and ultimately increase sales. Following Fixturelite's best-practices guidelines, and avoiding common mistakes, could help signage strategies succeed.

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Why Vending?

Technology will attract new blood to the industry



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“

It can be a difficult and complicated process to start (or restart) a vending business and test new ideas.”

WHEN I JOINED AUTOMATIC MERCHANDISER 10 MONTHS

ago, I asked a new colleague, a seasoned vending industry veteran himself, what will attract new people to this industry? And what will motivate the heirs of family-owned independents to stay the course and advance? Over the years I had become a little desensitized to the industry's appeal by the hastening pace of mergers, acquisitions and consolidation taking place among operating firms.

One of the things I admired about the vending business is that almost anyone can enter it, at any age and with any amount of money. These low entry barriers allowed someone with a van, garage, some mechanical ability and modest capital for equipment to get started. (Succeeding, of course, required an additional set of tools and skills.)

My colleague's answer to my questions: “Technology.” Hmm... I've heard this before. But this was coming from a guy, who's been around long enough, who should be more anesthetized than I. While I was hoping for another answer, it was the certainty in his tone that struck me. But the technology inducement finally connected with me after I had the honor of interviewing the management team of Legend Food Service, a four-year-old convenience services enterprise, for this issue's cover story.

Legend Food Service started with the acquisition of one of southern New England's largest independent vending operations. Automated Services was founded in Milford, CT, in the early 1970s by young and enterprising businessperson, too. After a modest start, the full-line provider soon had the newest machines and eventually ran fresh-food commissary, making it difficult for other vendors to compete. He prized diversification; he had an impressive equipment refurbishing center and at one time might have been the nation's second-largest reseller of new and used pinball machines. However, he did not take on the challenge of upgrading his company's management processes, to take full advantage of today's best-in-class information technologies – he knew that would be a job for a new owner.

It can be a difficult and complicated process to start (or restart) a vending business and test new ideas. But when you invest in the right technology, you are almost guaranteed to grow and improve your business, and to attract investors. Legend Food Service's first task was to swathe Automated Services' routes with a VMS and begin the move from vending machines to micro markets.

What's most heartening about Legend is its unshakable enthusiasm for an industry that suffered devastating income losses in 2020 – more than 40% in vending and over 70% in office coffee service. Surprisingly, the company's leadership team is most enthusiastic about the future of office coffee service.

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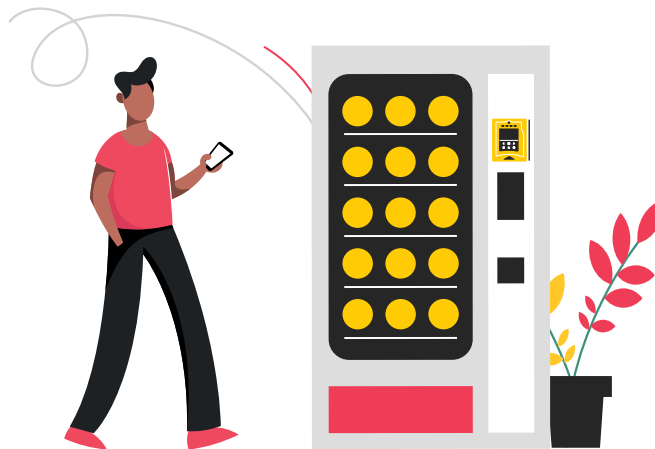
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Retrofittable



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Monitoring and
reporting system



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(tap/insert enabled)



Future-proof

TOP NEWS

Jolene Gulley-Bolton succeeds Ron Bean as AM/VMW publisher

[TRANSITION]

BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS MEDIA

veteran Jolene Gulley-Bolton has been appointed publisher of *Automatic Merchandiser* and VendingMarketWatch.com. Gulley succeeds Ron Bean, who has retired.

Gulley-Bolton brings 30+ years' publishing experience to the two vending media brands, owned by Endeavor Business Media LLC. Between 2000 and 2020, she was a publisher at Cygnus and AC Business Media, whose publications cover heavy construction, manufacturing and the supply chain markets, among other industries. From 2007 to 2019, she was group publisher of Food Logistics and Supply & Demand Chain Executive magazines. For the past two years, she ran her own company. Gulley-Bolton reports to EBM executive vice president Lester Craft.



Jolene Gulley-Bolton



Ron Bean

A 40-year publishing and advertising pro, Bean became publisher of AM and VMW in February 2015. He led the media outlets through several years of growth and guided it through the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I am confident that Jolene Gulley-Bolton's experience and perspective will help ensure that AM and VMW will continue as vibrant and critical sources of information for our readers, and as beneficial vehicles for our advertisers," Craft said. "At the same time, while Ron Bean's contributions and presence will be missed, I join with the AM/VMW team in wishing him a fulfilling and well-deserved retirement."



Avanti Markets founder Jim Brinton (r.) welcomes 365 Retail Markets founder Joe Hessling to Avanti's Seattle office.

365 Retail Markets and Avanti Markets confirm merger

The micro market giants confirmed their anticipated merger. Simultaneously, the newly expanded micro market entity is folding in Lightspeed Automation, an automated product picking system widely used by micro market and vending operators. Avanti and 365 founders and chief executives, respectively, Jim Brinton and Joe Hessling, made the merger announcement in a YouTube post recorded at Avanti's Seattle headquarters.

VendingMarketWatch.com/21239001



Investor begins rollup of cooler display sector

New York City-based Ronin Equity Partners acquired two manufacturers of commercial refrigeration equipment, QBD and Minus Forty, both located in the Toronto area. They

will continue to operate under their own names, but the merged group is the start of a consolidation platform in the fragmented refrigerated display case industry, where 60% of the market is divided among 100-plus family-owned businesses. The price of the purchases was not disclosed, but the transactions reportedly have an enterprise value of \$230 million.

VendingMarketWatch.com/21237607



CAPITAL PROVISIONS

SoCal vendor heads to Palm Springs

Southern California's Capital Provisions acquired C&C Vending of Palm Springs. C&C is the first purchase by Capital Provisions in the Coachella Valley, and the operation's sixth acquisition to date. Terms were not disclosed.

VendingMarketWatch.com/21237622



HGV acquires All Texas Vending

Healthy Generation Vending of Humble, TX, acquired nearby All Texas Vending of Houston, according to HGV owners Tim and Michael Ray. All Texas Vending was founded by Brad Bolin more than 17 years ago. The transaction was brokered by Mike Ferguson of VMAC Solutions.

VendingMarketWatch.com/21238788

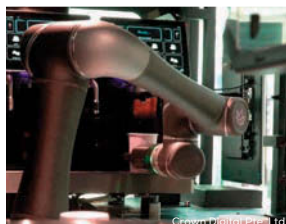


Core-Mark

PFG completes \$2.5B Core-Mark purchase

Performance Food Group Co. finalized its \$2.5 billion acquisition of Core-Mark, one of North America's largest wholesale distributors in the convenience retail channel. Core-Mark has \$17 billion in net sales, 8,000 employees and 32 distribution centers in the U.S. and Canada. It delivers to 41,000 customer locations. The acquisition creates a convenience business within PFG's Vistar segment that now includes Core-Mark and Eby-Brown. Core-Mark will continue to operate under its name; it is headquartered in Westlake,

TX. Eby Brown maintains operations in Naperville, IL. **VendingMarketWatch.com/21236815**



Crown Digital Asia Ltd

Robot baristas will serve Singapore MRT

Robotic baristas will begin serving coffee drinks to commuters in 30 Singapore Mass Rapid Transit stations by the end of 2022. Built by startup Crown Digital, the robot called Ella has a retail footprint less than 5 square meters, features a contactless interface and serves 200 cups of gourmet coffee per hour. MRT commuters will be able to order ahead of time using an app and collect

the drinks immediately upon arrival at a station. **VendingMarketWatch.com/21236184**



Amazon

Evoca sells coffee machines on Amazon

European machine manufacturer Evoca Group is now selling Saeco and SGL commercial coffee brewers on Amazon. Evoca said the move allows it "to access new market segments and look for new customers operating beyond the company's traditional prospects." **VendingMarketWatch.com/21236677**

MORE ONLINE



Selecta and Fiserv advance cashless vending in Europe

VendingMarketWatch.com/21235688

Compass enjoys strong close to year, improves revenue

VendingMarketWatch.com/21239741

Mastercard to phase out magnetic-stripe cards by 2029

VendingMarketWatch.com/21235724

Dutch Bros closes IPO

VendingMarketWatch.com/21239175

PEOPLE IN THE NEWS



Gilbert

Allan Z. Gilbert, 82, died Aug. 29

Gilbert was a vending industry innovator. He founded New England Vending Corp. of Lowell, MA, in 1959, and later branched out to start Data Intelligence Systems Corp., Lemon Tree Systems and Merrimac Financial Associates.



Taylor

Robert Taylor Sr., 88, died Sep. 11

Burdette Beckmann Inc.'s founder and former chief had a career spanning 55 years. He founded the consumer goods brokerage agency in 1955 after working for Liggett & Myers Tobacco Co. He was the candy industry's Hall of Famer in 1995.



Bené

NRA chief executive steps down

After 15 months at the helm of the National Restaurant Association, Tom Bené is stepping down as chief executive. A 30-year veteran of the F&B industry, he is returning to the beverage distribution sector.



Kwong

Bobachino appoints chief 'boba' officer

Bobacino named Stacey Kwong chief "boba" officer and strategic advisor. Bobacino makes an automated boba bubble tea bar. Kwong is cofounder of MILK+T, the first self-serve boba and bubble tea food truck.



Milikin

Keurig Dr Pepper taps supply chain chief

The beverage company named Tony Milikin chief supply chain officer. He reports to chief executive Bob Gamgort and succeeds Fernando Cortes. Milikin has end-to-end supply chain responsibility.



Sullivan

NCR's new president transformation

NCR Corp. promoted Owen Sullivan to president. Sullivan is responsible for NCR's growth and customer satisfaction initiatives; he will also spearhead its transformation to a software and services-led enterprise.

The Long Game

Besides survival, what should operators be focusing on?

By Bob Tullio, Contributing Editor

JUST WHEN OFFICE COFFEE SERVICE operators thought there was a light at the end of the pandemic tunnel, the delta variant had delivered a gut punch. Once again, the reopening dates are off, as Sep. 1 turned out to be a false promise. Besides survival, what should operators be focusing on?

My suggestion: play the “long game.”

The long game is about providing quality service and value to clients

who are still underperforming, like that 200-person location that has only 40 back in the office. While it would be easy to ignore the needs of these less profitable clients, that is a mistake for operators who plan to flourish after the pandemic is finally squashed.

EXAMPLE OF THE SHORT GAME

Here is a real-life example of playing the “short game” instead of the long game. This happened to me in early August.

I had an outdoor plug that was clearly defective. Southern California sun can take a toll on just about anything after 20 years of exposure. I personally do not like playing electrician, so I called a Google-approved company to come out and replace the plug.

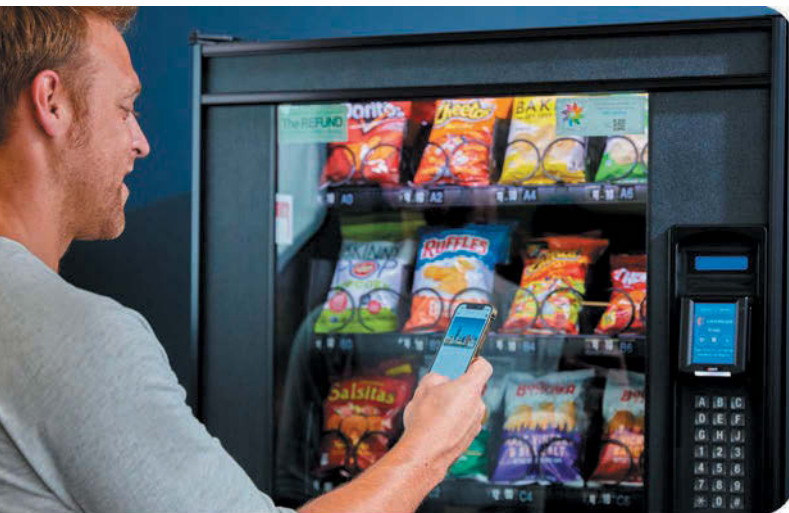
Jack, the technician, was very professional when he took pictures and retreated to his truck to write up an estimate. He returned in 15 minutes with three options:

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- Run a new electrical line to the breaker box and replace the plug: \$2,600.
- Re-run the current electrical line to the breaker box and replace the plug: \$1,200.
- Replace the plug after a complete diagnostic evaluation: \$650.

Somewhat stunned, I asked, “You mean, you just can’t replace the plug?”

“No sir, we have certain procedures,” Jack said.

Then I tried to tug at his heartstrings by asking, “Is this the same job you would offer to a family member, like your dad, for example?”

“My dad would fix it himself. He is an electrician,” Jack replied.

“We aren’t the cheapest company out there and maybe, we just aren’t the right company for you,” he added. “We have a company policy that I have to follow.”

GEE, THAT MAKES ME FEEL GOOD

After that nice little touch of feeling cheap and demeaned, I sent him on his way and fixed it myself. Note to DIYs: if you *shut down* all the power in the house, it is hard to get shocked!

Of course, because every company today is obsessed with customer feedback, I was contacted by Ron, the electrical contractor’s customer retention specialist.

“We noticed that you didn’t use our services,” Ron said. “How did it go with Jack?”

I made it clear to Ron that Jack was totally professional, but that Jack is stuck with a company that plays the “short game” when it comes to customer service. Instead of providing a solution that everyone would feel good about, Jack was following a company policy of chasing the quick buck, no matter how obviously distasteful it was to the customer.

“The fact that the diagnosis of the problem, an obvious problem, was \$200 alone, that was incredible. Jack



Operators who continue to deliver quality services now will develop a stronger business in the long run.

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You are resilient, you have found a way to survive and we are getting close to some sense of normalcy once again – we can only hope.

didn’t even bother to check and see if the plug was working,” I explained.

THANKS FOR THE NEW MATERIAL

Naturally, I thanked him for providing me with an excellent example of playing the customer service “short game.” Because of the electrical contractor’s approach:

- I would never use them for any future job, small or large.
- I would never refer them to anyone.
- If I were a vindictive type, I would probably give them a scathing review on Yelp.

THE CHALLENGE FOR OPERATORS

OCS operators face the same challenge as that electrical contractor. It is easy to gouge on price or just say no to customer requests during these

difficult times. Clients are desperate and frustrated. They want service for their underperforming facilities, especially for the few employees who are required to be in the office until the post-pandemic “all clear.”

When that stressed out office manager calls your office and asks for four cases of bottled water instead of the 40 cases that they would normally order, make the delivery. When that HR director calls, completely panicked about the inventory of paper cups (even though two sleeves will probably last their depleted staff another week), try to get someone out there to take inventory of the situation.

LONG GAME RICHES AND REFERRALS

As a former operator, I know that playing the long game is a tall order, especially when survival is at the top of the list, but here is the reality: you are resilient, you have found a way to survive and we are getting close to some sense of normalcy once again – we can only hope.

When the fog lifts and that elusive horizon is finally in sight, the operators who played the long game and delivered quality service and value despite the obvious challenges; they will enjoy the riches that accompany solid business relationships and the referrals that come from delivering excellence in both good times and bad. ■

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BREAKFAST

Up And At 'Em

Breakfast-inspired foods are becoming increasingly important in micro markets and vending machines to satisfy round-the-clock hunger at work

By Nick Montano, Editor



Long considered the most important meal of the day, breakfast is also a meal that's enjoyed at all times, whether it's on the go, sitting down in an eatery, at home or at work.

During the COVID-19 pandemic and its ensuing lockdowns, essential workers and first responders drove demand for ready-to-eat breakfast selections, and vending machines and micro markets became go-to destinations for workers. Meanwhile, workers sheltering at home and freed from their commutes transitioned from on-the-go breakfast items to more substantial fare, embracing what Whole Foods has called the "epic breakfast every day" trend.

Another defining trend of 2020: indulgence. Aligned with that trend, this year's list of most-ordered breakfast foods, according to Statista, showed huge growth for sweet items like acai bowls (up 353% year over year) and frozen mocha beverages (+336%); following were chorizo burritos (up 304%), potato pancakes (+264%) and strawberry banana smoothies (+216%).

A recent study conducted by the Harris Poll and commissioned by General Mills Foodservice found that consumers are eating more breakfast foods than normal during the pandemic and not just in the morning hours. Nearly a quarter reported eating more breakfast foods during the COVID-19 pandemic than they normally would (24%) with items such as eggs (72%), cereal and pancakes (both 51%) and bakery items such as donuts (36%), cinnamon rolls (34%) and muffins (33%) among the top favorite items. Further, nearly four in five Americans (79%) have eaten breakfast foods outside of the traditional breakfast meal in the past year.

The nationwide poll, conducted between Feb. 11 and 16, surveyed more than 2,000 adults, ages 18 and over, to learn how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their eating habits at home, work or dining in public.

"The recent poll shows that people are eating more breakfast foods during the pandemic and enjoying them for lunch, dinner and even dessert," said Mark Harmon, who analyzes consumer insights for General Mills Foodservice. "We also learned that consumers are eager to return to restaurants to enjoy their favorite breakfast and brunch foods."

For operators of micro markets and vending in workplace venues, these trends signal that the breakfast boom will continue as more people return to work.

Results from General Mills' poll suggested that consumers who are eating more breakfast foods during the pandemic over the past year are doing so because they feel they have more freedom in what and when they eat. Poll participants said they have more time in their schedules (52%), they've been craving their favorite breakfast foods (37%), they want to eat something fun that brings them joy (33%) or breakfast favorites remind them of childhood (24%).

"Consumers' love of breakfast is strong, giving chefs and foodservice operations the chance to reimagine breakfast," said Harmon, who added that breakfast often has an impulsive nature that can be activated with new and different menu items. "For instance, consumers may not have breakfast for dinner in their regular rotation of eating, but they may be tempted to splurge on it for a memorable experience," he observed.

The General Mills study offers other helpful findings. Consumers have a deep affection for breakfast, for instance, with three in five Americans (62%) saying it is their favorite

meal of the day and over half (56%) saying they love breakfast food more now than they did a year ago. And three-quarters of survey respondents (79%) have eaten breakfast foods for meals other than breakfast in the past year with more than half (59%) saying they have eaten breakfast foods for dinner. Additionally, half have enjoyed breakfast foods for lunch and one-fifth have eaten breakfast items for dessert. Lastly, more than half (66%) said they love creative twists on breakfast menu items.



Consumers' love of breakfast is strong, giving chefs and foodservice operations the chance to reimagine breakfast."

Mark Harmon, General Mills Foodservice

CLASSIC AND ARTISAN

Employees back at work should expect more offerings at their micro markets and vending machines, and breakfast options are no exception. Accordingly, more of the industry's food suppliers are offering appealing breakfast selections.

Founded in 1955, E.A. Sween Co. manufactures a wide range of breakfast sandwiches for the Deli Express and Market Sandwich lines. Sandwiches ship frozen and have a 14-day refrigerated shelf life once thawed. Market Sandwich items are packaged in a paper bag with a clear window for product visibility. Items in both lines can be purchased from a refrigeration unit and heated in the package in the microwave, making them perfect for markets or vending.

"Eating on the go has changed throughout the pandemic," said EA



Several types of breakfast sandwiches are offered by EA Sween's Deli Express line.

EA Sween

“

As things have evolved over the past year and a half we have started to shift back to normal where consumers are on the go and looking for fast prepackaged food they feel safe eating.”

Abby Ostlund, EA Sween

Sween marketing manager Abby Ostlund. “At the onset during lockdowns, we saw a shift away from eating on the go as people were stuck at home and not commuting to and from an office. As things have evolved over the past year and a half we have started to shift back to normal where consumers are on the go and looking for fast prepackaged food they feel safe eating.”

As more operators seek sales data to help them decide which products to include in their plan-o-grams, Eden Prairie, MN-based EA Sween can provide Nielsen information regarding top-selling varieties, best-product mixes and fastest-growing varieties, among other rank categories.

“We use Nielsen data across the board to understand overall category performance, competitive performance, trends, growth areas, new opportunities and best-selling items,” Ostlund said. “We also conduct our

consumer research and utilize research from several outside sources to better understand consumer behaviors, buying behavior, industry trends and category trends.”

Because many food suppliers are unable to deliver products on time and the shortage of fresh foods in various markets, EA Sween's sales have taken off over the past year.

KETO SANDWICH

Keto is now America's favorite diet. See for yourself by searching for the “most popular diet trends” on Google and you'll likely find that Americans are more interested in keto than any other diet. The ketogenic diet, high in fat and low in carbs, however, can be challenging to follow. With restrictions on what one is permitted to eat and what they cannot eat, keto meal and snack options may be limited.

But now there's a convenient keto option in vending and micro markets from Cheesewich, a family-owned company based in Hodgkins, IL. The original breadless sandwich snack, vacuumed packed, consists of two slices of cheese with salami. Available cheeses include colby jack, pepper jack, cheddar and provolone. Cheesewich products are enjoying brisk sales, according to the company's marketing manager, Sarah Nesci, who reported a 30% sales increase year over year.

The five-year-old company's new Breakfast Taco, which began shipping

Cheesewich's keto-friendly Breakfast Taco is made with turkey bacon, colby jack cheese, an egg patty and flour tortilla.

Cheesewich



Grab-and-go breakfast burritos and sandwiches from Alpha Foods are made with meatless sausage, plant egg and dairy-free cheese.

Alpha Foods

in in September, is made with turkey bacon, colby jack cheese, an egg patty and flour tortilla. This keto breakfast sandwich needs only 25 seconds in a microwave to heat. Also available is the Uncured Turkey Baconwich, made by wrapping all-natural uncured turkey bacon around mozzarella cheese. These two products possess low-moisture content and use hearty string cheeses.

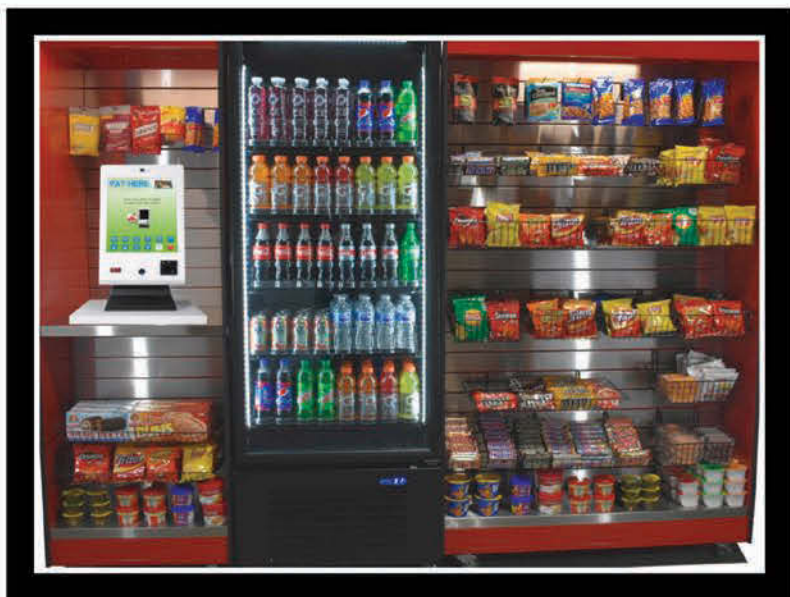
PLANT FORWARD

More and more convenience customers are interested in healthy, plant-based alternatives to start the day, according to data from Label Insight, a NielsonIQ company. To see which breakfast foods increased in popularity during the pandemic, the CPG data source analyzed online searches. In the breakfast meal and sandwich categories, search volume augmented for product features like “healthy,” “veggie,” “ketogenic,” “low carb” and “gluten-free.” In the cereal category, such characteristics as “organic,” “paleo,” “sugar free” and “high fiber” rose. Searches for frozen breakfast sandwiches and meals soared 311% in 2020.

Positioning with the plant-based and vegan movements, Peet's Coffee together with Beyond Meat and Just Egg launched the Everything plant-based sandwich, which began selling at Peet's stores this past spring. Last year, Starbucks Corp. made its first move into vegan meat with its vegetarian Impossible Breakfast Sandwich. And one year ago, convenience store chain Wawa rolled out its Beyond



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Meat breakfast sandwiches nationwide. Wawa's Sizzli Breakfast Sandwich features Beyond breakfast sausage – made with ingredients like peas and brown rice, without GMOs, soy and gluten – and egg and cheese on a bagel. Eaters can also customize orders with Beyond breakfast sausage like breakfast bowls, burritos or bagel sandwiches.

In the vending and micro market channel, plant-based breakfast sandwiches are wanting. “There is a huge lack of plant-based breakfast options,” said Alpha Foods chief executive Cole Orobetz. “So, we are continuously reimagining convenient, plant-based options for everyone to enjoy during every meal of the day.”

Alpha Foods offers a grab-and-go lineup that includes two sandwich varieties and three burritos that are made with meatless sausage, plant egg and dairy-free cheese, along with meatless chorizo and spices for the burritos. Both the sandwiches and burritos weigh 5.5 oz. They ship frozen.

CRUNCHY ESSENTIALS

Granola is usually considered a healthy breakfast item, and its shelf-stable quality makes it a vending staple. The toasted mixture of rolled oats, nuts and a sweetener like sugar or honey, can also include other grains, puffed rice, dried fruit, seeds, spices and nut butters.

New for vending and micro markets in the category is Jessica's granola in chocolate chip, vanilla maple, butterscotch chip and pecan almond flavors. The product is handmade in small batches. It's non-GMO verified, gluten-free certified and kosher. It's available in convenient 2-oz. snack bags for on-the-go consumption.

Jessica Natural Foods is based in Birmingham, MI, and was founded by Jessica Mindell in 2009. “Our sales show that customers are definitely eating more granola,” Mindell said. “With people working from home, they are

finding more time to eat breakfast since. From a grocery perspective, we are expanding into more stores.”

AUTHENTIC COMFORT IN A VENDING PACKAGE

When it comes to breakfast comfort food, waffles have maintained widespread popularity for a longtime for two important reasons: nostalgia and simplicity of preparation. But how do you bring a waffle experience to an unmanned packaged food environment like vending and micro markets? Enter Mountain Waffle Co.

Single-serve Mountain Waffles for vending and markets are offered in several flavors and packed in large (3.17 oz.) and medium (2.12 oz.) sizes.

Mountain Waffle Co.



Jessica's granola bags are available in convenient 2-oz. snack bags for on-the-go vending patrons.

Jessica Natural Foods

Mountain Waffle began serving Liege Belgian waffles in Steamboat Springs, CO, and soon expanded to ski resorts in 11 other states. Skiers liked them so much, they unrelentingly asked the company to make them available after the winter season. So now they're available in foodservice (frozen dough), freezer packs, bulk packs and private label, as well as in single-serve packs for vending and convenience channels.

Made from authentic Liege Belgian waffle dough with all-natural ingredients, single-serve Mountain Waffles are offered in several flavors and packed in large (3.17 oz.) and medium (2.12 oz.) sizes. Waffles can be eaten right out of the wrapper at room temperature or quickly warmed up – with or without toppings. They have an 18-month shelf-life for frozen storage and stay fresh up to 10 weeks at ambient temperature. Flavors include butter, maple syrup, dark chocolate chip and cocoa covered. ■





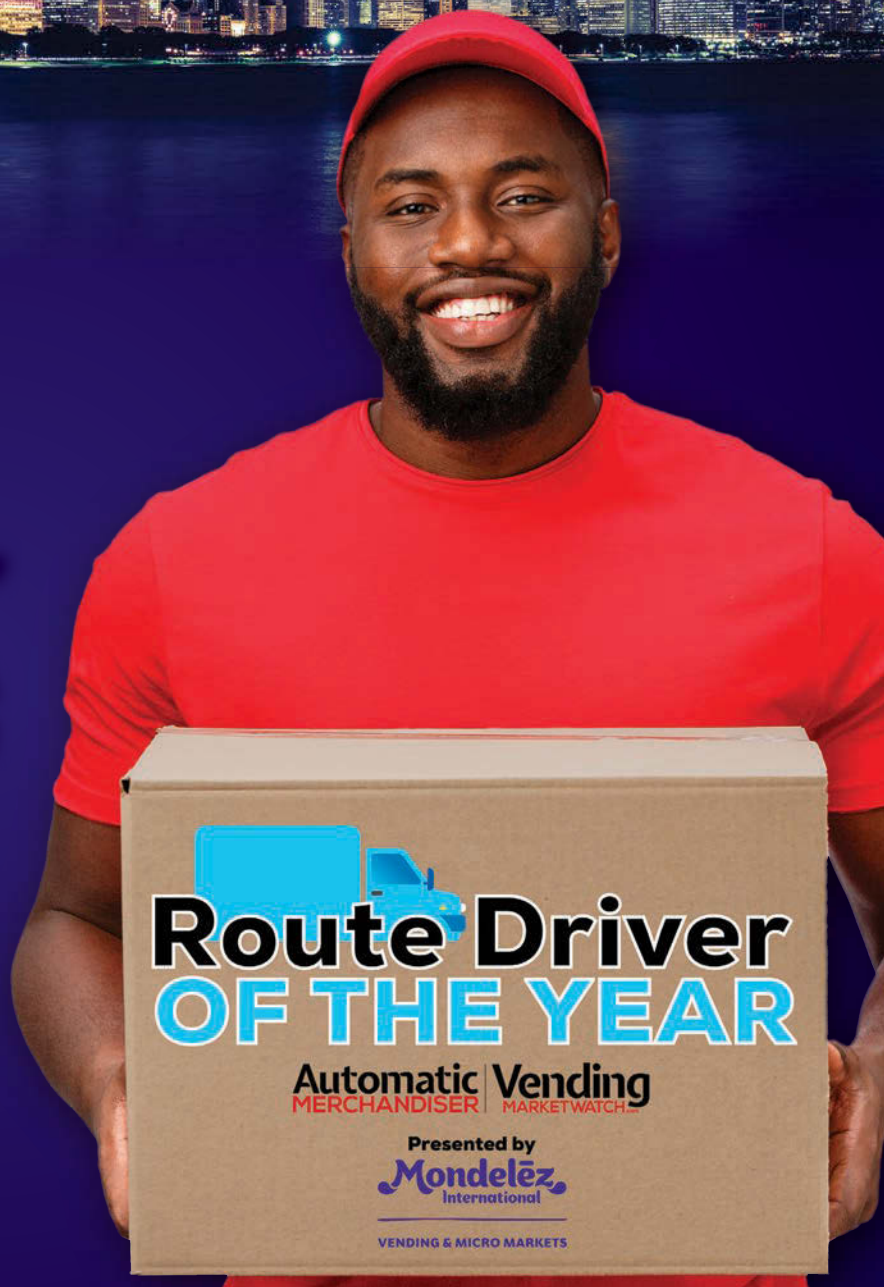
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20 Months In

Needed or not, some clients expect touchless solutions in the COVID-era office breakroom. Operators should have options ready.

By Nick Montano, Editor

As evidence has piled up through the course of the pandemic, now in its 20th month, our scientific understanding about the virus continues to change. In the first two months of the COVID-19 outbreak, it was mistakenly believed that the coronavirus behind the pandemic could linger and spread on doorknobs and other surfaces.

However, the science community soon discovered that COVID-19 rarely spreads through surfaces. Instead, COVID-19 almost always spreads when infected people discharge aerosols, consisting of large droplets and small particles, when they cough, sneeze, talk or breathe – just like the spreading attributes of influenza. Aerosols can be inhaled by

people nearby. Surface transmission, although possible, is not considered to be a significant risk of spread.

That's too bad – because it's much easier to clean and guard surfaces than it is to improve or replace ventilation systems. Nevertheless, almost two years into the pandemic, consumers have come to expect surface disinfection protocols, especially at work in breakrooms. Within the first months of the pandemic, operators and their suppliers were in the sanitizing business – finding ways to reduce contact points required by a customer when using vending, coffee and water equipment.

So, we continue to deep clean and reduce touchpoints as part of the COVID protocol. For its part, amid a clear belief that touchpoints were dangerous and needed to be minimized, the convenience services industry responded with smartphone apps and a wide variety of touch-free ways to deliver snacks, a cup of coffee or to check out from a micro market kiosk without touching anything but the finished product.





Bravilor Bonamat's Contactless Coffee Control app is shown here with company's SEGO bean-to-cup office brewer. The CCC app works with an NFC reader compatible with iOS and Android devices. Bravilor offers an upgrade kit that adds the touchless app feature to its machines.

Bravilor Bonamat

WORD ON THE STREET

The convenience services industry, through service protocols and equipment designs, has always strived to keep consumers safe. But are fundamental changes government and media are talking about necessary? Earlier this year, just as vaccines began to roll out a rapid pace, we asked some leading operators if the demand for touch-free technology in OCS and vending locations will have staying power.

Matthew Marsh of First-Class Vending, which operates in Las Vegas and Los Angeles, said, "If a client requests it, we can do it. From our experience, however, the clients that have received it are not using it. It is a neat gimmick, but I do not think it's going to stick. It's just not necessary."

Tom Steuber of San Leandro-based Associated Services added, "Our thinking on this is that we will absolutely have customers who will insist on touch-free equipment, but as time goes by, it will be used less and less. In our own office, we saw people use it initially, but as people get more and more comfortable about touch points, they stop using it."

It could be the "cool factor" that lends longevity to the idea of a touchless breakroom, according to Arthur Siller of Seattle's Evergreen Refreshments. "From our experience, we do not think touch-free technology is going to be prevalent," Siller noted. "We saw a big rush to touch-free technology, including wraps on equip-

ment, and we can present options to clients. The technology is very cool and appealing to many. It is the 'cool factor' that might drive the interest, especially with younger people."

For Judson Kleinman of Corporate Essentials, which services clients in the New York City market, touchless technology is here to stay. "[Touchless] comes up in almost every conversation," he said. "It is here to stay, but in a year or two it won't be on people's minds as much. Today though, it comes up in almost every conversation with clients who are ready to bring back their employees."

When *Automatic Merchandiser* spoke to these operators, among other

COFFEE SOLUTIONS

Touchless in the context of technology can be defined as a device that operates without needing to touch it. Human-machine interfaces in the touchless niche include proximity-enabled screens, camera-based gestures, voice recognition and eye-tracking tech.

Major suppliers in the OCS space like Newco, Bunn-O-Matic, Keurig Dr Pepper, Nestlé and Lavazza developed

“

We saw a big rush to touch-free technology, including wraps on equipment, and we can present options to clients. The technology is very cool and appealing to many."

Arthur Siller of Seattle's Evergreen Refreshments

industry leaders, it seemed as though the COVID-19 pandemic would be in operators' rearview mirrors by the end of the summer. Eclipsed by the delta variant, the anticipated convenience services revival never came this September, when kids would go back to school and at-home employees would return to offices. Once again, sanitation and touchless is at the forefront.

novel touchless features to help make employees' safety the top priority.

One year ago, Nestlé added a feature to its coffeemakers that lets an individual select their choice by holding their hands over the menu options. And several months ago, Nespresso Memento OCS machines received an update that enables users to insert a capsule and then choose their

preferred cup size and recipe directly from their phone, without touching the machine.

This year, Keurig Commercial, the away-from-home division of Keurig Dr Pepper, introduced touchless brewing capabilities for its bean-to-cup office coffee equipment. Using the new Keurig Remote Brew app, users can brew a coffee or specialty beverages through a mobile device. Keurig's first touchless brewing innovation complements its Safe Brewing Toolkit, designed to support safe and hygienic coffee stations in the workplace; the kit includes floor decals for social distancing, brewer signage to support cleaning schedules and coffeemaker deep-cleaning kits.

"Coffee is a valued workplace amenity, and businesses are facing new challenges as they bring their employees back to the office and reopen break-



The new Nespresso Momento Coffee & Milk machine boasts touchless functionality for peace of mind and barista-quality, milk-based recipes to satisfy all coffee preferences at the office. It can be programmed to operate with touchless remote control, lock screen or automatic brewing.

Nestlé Professional

rooms," said KDP senior vice president of away-from-home Phil Drapeau.

During the NAMA Show in August, Spain's Azkoyen Group, a maker of vending machines and payment systems, demonstrated a coffee machine controlled solely by eye gaze. The eye-tracking technology, developed by Irisbond, was paired with Azkoyen's Vitro M5 superautomatic coffee machine. The user's gaze is analyzed by the Irisbond infrared-based eye-tracking technology, which calculates the exact point at which the user is looking so they can control the machine without touching it.

"We are very satisfied with the warm reception that this innovation has enjoyed in Spain, as it demonstrates the importance of improving the user experience, and we want to take it to the United States," said Juanje Alberdi, chief executive of Azkoyen's coffee, vending and payments divisions. Alberdi said that Azkoyen has patented this "distance selection" feature as used in a coffee machine.

For more than a year, Bunn has enjoyed success with its Virtual-TOUCH approach. The company's bean-to-cup machines can work with a QR code that allows users to order

beverages through a webpage. This way, employees' touchless experiences can be enhanced while ensuring their safety. Fully automated through a smartphone, VirtualTOUCH provides access to a full beverage menu and step-by-step instructions, while reducing shared contact points. Additionally, Bunn's system can integrate with 365 Retail Markets' payment app to add coffee service to any micro market.

Bravilor Bonamat, a Dutch manufacturer with a U.S. office in Aurora, IL, now offers its SEGO bean-to-cup machine with Contactless Coffee Control, or the CCC app. It works with an NFC reader that is compatible with iOS and Android devices.

The CCC app is available as a kit. Installation takes just a few minutes, according to Arjan de Groot, vice president of Bravilor North America. Once installed, the option to select and dispense a beverage via the CCC app is visible to the customer on SEGO's display. After the one-time app download, the client selects their favorite beverage, and confirms their selection by holding the phone near the front of the SEGO. "The CCC app is swift and simple to use," De Groot said.

"The app was developed as a conscious decision not to charge the operator repeatedly for modems and fixed subscription and data costs," De Groot added. "We've heard from our customers that the low entry-to-market cost helps them add the touchless feature to the SEGO, giving their clients peace of mind and an improved guest experience, without a big additional investment."

SEGO is Bravilor Bonamat's flagship whole-bean coffee machine for the new normal. It was created for small-to medium-size offices accommodating between 20 and 100 employees.

WATER SOLUTIONS

One of the things missing during the homeworking period was the routine



Waterlogic's patented Firewall system dispenses purified water that is more than 99% virus and bacteria-free. Pictured here are Waterlogic units with Firewalls. The WL15 and WL3 Firewalls with infrared technology can be added to any Waterlogic units.

Waterlogic



New in Elkay's Smartwell collection is a countertop beverage dispenser that prepares custom beverages hands free by using a touchscreen or mobile device. The dispenser gives employees and facility guests access to hygienic hydration.

Elkay



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one-on-one networking around the water cooler. Aquabeve, Bevi, Elkay, FloWater, Quench, Vertex and

James Taylor demonstrates FloWater's pedal-activated refill station, which converts tap water into purified water. The refill station also eliminates the need for plastic bottles.

Nick Montano/Automatic Merchandiser

Waterlogic, among a dozen other manufacturers, offer high-tech solutions beyond a foot pedal. Motion and optical the sensors ensure sanitary appearances.

New Beverage Ventures, dba Aquabeve was founded in 2017 in Laverne, CA. It offers the Inspirations touchless water cooler line in two models (hot/cold IB215RT and cook/cold IB115RT). The Inspirations lineup is available in plumbed and bottled water versions. They use an optical sensor for dispensing cold water and, for safety, a double-optical sensor for hot water.

"The optical sensors work with glass, plastic, Styrofoam and paper cups, as well as all swell-type containers offering a truly COVID-free experience. There is no need to ever touch the unit itself," explained Aquabeve marketing vice-president Don Fletcher.

"As the COVID crisis was growing," Fletcher added, "we recognized the need for a solution to provide water at work and home. We experimented with pedals, buttons and other options, but realized none of these options was the perfect solution. Pedals were problematic because they were out of eye-shot and subject to kicking and unintended damage by cleaning crews.



Aquabeve's Inspirations water dispensers use optical sensors to enable touch-free operation. Coolers are offered in black and white finishes.

Aquabeve



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The buttons, while limiting the need to touch the unit, didn't alleviate it and was not the optimal solution. We realized optical sensors were the solution."

Developed to give office dwellers peace of mind, Quench USA's latest Q-Series offers a sensor-activated, touchless and "bottleless" dispensing solution. Quench's touchless systems have built-in sensor-activated panels. Users simply hover their hand or fingers over sensor-activated buttons to release a steady stream of water. They connect directly to a building's existing water supply.

The Q-Series is available in three dispensing capacities, including the Quench Q4 (serves about 25 people a day); Quench Q8 (50 people per day); and Quench Q12 (100 people per day).

"All Quench Q-Series options produce quenchWATER+, which



Quench's sensor-activated Q-Series includes the Q4, Q8 and Q12 models.

Quench USA

uses a proprietary 5-filter setup to add electrolytes and improve taste by removing sediments and contaminants," explained the company's vice president of product management, Ted Hertz. "The result is crisp, clean, great-tasting electrolyte water for health-conscious businesses." ■



Steve Voznick demonstrates Vertex Water Products' touchless RFID interface on the 9500-HF (hands free) cooler. Users place a glass in the fill area and hold their hand in front of the sensor to unlock and activate. The infrared sensor works within a 2" proximity. Users change hand position to enable cold, hot and unlock zones.

Nick Montano/Automatic Merchandiser



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OPERATION PROFILE

They are
Legend



LEGEND
Food Service

This enterprising operation is looking to bring fresh perspectives to the industry as it continues to evolve into the 21st century. Kyle Loughran, Nick Duda, Kevin Koehr and Ben Adams are the management team leading Legend Food Service

By Nick Montano, Editor

This up-and-coming convenience services company has been busy buying and building legacy vending operations – and rolling up its sleeves to do whatever it takes to maximize performance at new and existing accounts of any size.

Operating from dual headquarters in Connecticut and Maryland, Legend Food Service is an omnichannel provider of vending machines, micro markets, coffee, tea, pantry and water to workplaces. Its recipe for success starts with the deployment of the best unattended retail technology, an investment in its internal systems and a steadfast commitment to its people. In this context, Legend was able to maintain its service and operational planning cadence during the lowest points of the pandemic lockdowns, then accelerate the deployment of all its resources to meet the unpredictable demands through the reopening phase.

Legend arrived on the scene five years ago by acquiring an established full-line vending operation, Automated Services, which had served the New Haven area since the early 1970s. Legend, which is headquartered in neighboring East Haven, officially rebranded in 2020.

Legend purchased three more Connecticut operations and is now taking its brand farther south. In May, the company announced the acquisitions of Maryland's Vending Plus in Linthicum Heights (near Baltimore)

Nick Duda (l.) and Kevin Koehr welcome the challenges of growing and excelling in the convenience services industry.

Photos by Margaret Strada for Legend Food Service

and Jel-Cap Vending of Windsor Mill, and in September it added Prince Frederick's Varsity Vending and Micro Markets to its emergent mid-Atlantic service platform.

"The Legend team saw an opportunity in the vending space in 2017. We saw there were a couple of private-equity backed rollups and some large independents, but not much in the middle," said Legend Food Service chief executive Kyle Loughran. "We saw an opportunity to build a network of strong, local operators and provide them with the capital and infrastructure that are typically only available to the 'big guys.'"



Whether it's technology, merchandising or price increases, we aren't afraid to experiment with something new to see what works and what doesn't."

Kyle Loughran

"Maintaining strong local relationships, leaning heavily on technology and giving the business the capital to grow, the sky would be the limit for that team," Loughran added.

For this reason, Legend placed its newly acquired New Haven operations on vending management systems and moved into a new warehouse with

enough space to support four times the size of the combined businesses.

The additional space was needed. During its first year, Legend's micro market sales increased 300%. Loughran gives much of the credit to "great local management," especially David Murphy, the company's general manager in Connecticut. "He's done an incredible job," he said.

CREATIVE POTENTIAL

Looking at the backgrounds of Legend's young executive team, one might think they should be working at banks, tech startups, Fortune 500 companies, even the Defense Department. "We are very much non-vending people, which makes it all the more humbling when we encounter great people in the industry," Loughran said. "We know we will never be the best managers of any of our locations. Rather, our job is to bring in the best minds in the industry and empower them to conquer their markets"

Loughran and Nick Duda, who heads corporate development at Legend, both come from the private-equity world, but they realize financial sponsors cannot outsmart the industry. "It does not work," Loughran underscored.

As outsiders, however, they do like to challenge paradigms.

"Whether it's technology, merchandising or price increases, we aren't afraid to experiment with something new to see what works and what doesn't," Loughran said. "It's part of our thesis that if we can alleviate some of the operational burdens at our branches, and leave them well capitalized, they will have the luxury to try out more innovative ways to serve customers and find more efficient ways to run the business."

To better assess what works, Legend Food Service aligned with unattended retail tech company Vagabond Vending, which furnished it with a better understanding of

convenience services and technology's effect on the channel's customers. The vending operation has deployed Vagabond's cashless products and consumer-engagement applications at several accounts.

Before fastening the operator's keyring to his belt, Loughran cut his teeth in the corporate world at Cvent, a software-as-a-service company specializing in meetings, events and hospitality, and PricewaterhouseCoopers, one of the Big Four accounting firms.

Duda worked in the accounting field, too; he's a CPA and CFA. Prior to starting his vending career, his job was identifying co-investing opportunities at a family investment firm, which had an office coffee and pantry service. At the time he did not know there was such a thing as a professional "pantry" service, but nevertheless he experienced how top-shelf snacks and coffee amenities, available in a communal environment where coworkers can meet, can bring joy to the workplace.

"As I got closer to the unattended convenience space and better understood its value, I realized how impactful our products can be," Duda said. "Having had these

end-user experiences, they focus us on the wellness of employees and the products they want."

Micro markets can be a powerful productivity and incentive tool for employers, Duda emphasized.

"They're an opportunity for the employer to recognize employee excellence, which creates occupational wellness, and an opportunity to lead in physical wellness by providing easy access to quality hydration, nutrition



Allie Humphreys is Legend's account executive for the Virginia territory.



Mike Allen is Legend's senior account executive for the Maryland region.



Anthony Comegys assembles a "prekit" bin at Legend's Linthicum Heights, MD, warehouse.



Legend Food Service's Lillian Spratley (l.) and Allie Humphreys review items listed in a location's order.

and caffeine that employees need and want," he said.

"There's also an opportunity for social wellness in the ability to gather in the breakroom," continued Duda, recalling his years as a corporate office denizen. "With camaraderie comes purpose and belonging – ultimately engagement – which drives profitability."

In that sense, Duda never left the investment industry. At Legend, his job is to find ways to create value for employers by delivering wellness and cutting-edge breakroom services to their employees. "We know we can excite and delight through the breakroom experience day in and day out, which makes us a trusted partner," he said.

Legend's vice president of operations, Kevin Koehr, spent the first decade of his professional life in military service, specializing in logistics and operations for the U.S. Army. Afterward, he gained valuable business experience working for government contractors. He joined forces with Loughran when Legend made its first acquisition in Connecticut.

"The most enticing aspect of joining this industry was the ability to be creative," Koehr said. "With so many new points of sale and products coming to market, it's an exciting challenge to find the best combination of that for the best customer experience – done efficiently."

His military mindset – "situational awareness" in army lingo – allows him to see how every operator, customer and market are different. For Koehr, Legend's acquisitions allow the company to grow its expertise by assimilating the experiences of a company's team and the lessons they learned.

Customer acquisition is a key part of Legend's growth strategy. As chief revenue office, Ben Adams is spearheading that effort. Adams spent 15 years in the real estate world, working at some of the nation's largest property and development firms, including Grubb & Ellis in Washington, DC, and Kane Realty Corp. in Raleigh, NC.

"While I've worked on many different types of transactions from office leases to developing grocery stores in the Northeast, my main focus was business development," Adams said. "The skill sets I've always needed in the past are complementary to those needed to lead and scale the sales and marketing function at a fast-growing business."

DEMAND SHOCK

Few industries were able to escape the rapid demand shocks brought on by the coronavirus crisis, especially service organizations. Demand shock is



Gathering for a company photo are Linthicum Heights' warehouse and office team members.

an unexpected event that dramatically decreases or increases the need for a product or service, usually temporarily. Where COVID-19 grounded airlines, for instance, it overwhelmed customer-care centers. For vending, micro market and office coffee providers, which exclusively operate on other businesses' premises, demand almost entirely disappeared after mid-March 2020, after the official call of the pandemic.

"While we kept things going, the pandemic certainly slowed down our plans," Loughran said. "In the fourth quarter of 2020 we returned to acquisition mode."

As was the case for many operators, COVID shut down or greatly reduced staff at many of Legend's accounts. But the downtime also created opportunities to improve its internal systems and strengthen connections with its vendors and partners.

"As a team, we were able to get into the nitty-gritty of finding different, more flexible ways to service customers without the comforts of a healthy market," Koehr pointed out.

"COVID reminded us of how impactful our product is," he added.

"Anyone close to distribution and logistics kept this country running during the crisis. The essential worker supply chain kept the heartbeat of this country going and we fueled that. There's patriotism in those efforts, and I salute all the operators around the country, including our teams here at Legend."

A few months into the pandemic, operators began getting calls from locations needing food and beverages as they began bringing back employees in limited numbers. Many of these businesses had reduced staff; and often inconsistent schedules: on one week, off the next, for instance. By rapidly



As I got closer to the unattended convenience space and better understood its value, I realized how impactful our products can be."

Nick Duda



assessing demand and matching supply, Legend was able to respond to these calls. And its willingness to break norms and find ways to provide good service and operate profitably, allowed it to deliver a vital service to the workforce.

"Where a client might have had 300 employees, pre-pandemic, and wanted to make a switch to Legend, but now had only 40 people in the office," Adams observed, "it's an account most people wouldn't have taken previously, but now you must figure out how to service that account and work with the customer as they scale back. Given our efficient management model, we're able to make decisions quickly and adapt to the changing workplace as we return to whatever the new normal might be."

The coronavirus also accelerated balance in the business-to-business dynamic, according to Duda.

"COVID-19 certainly makes you think about the kinds of business that operators are looking to

develop, acquire or divest,” he said. “Not all business is good business, and operators need to be wary of entering into contracts where economics are imbalanced. Vending management companies and employers recognize the tremendous value we bring to them. They want quality, consistent service that they know Legend Food Service can deliver.”

REOPENING PAINS

While mass location closures were the agonizing business reality of 2020, keeping up with the reopenings and new business in 2021 is proving to have its own pains.

“But this is a good problem!” Loughran said. “We’ve had to keep an eye on cash flow to make sure we don’t overextend ourselves, but again to our thesis, we believe in investing in our locations so that we can deploy equipment and service accounts more effectively than our competitors.”

As locations reopen, operations vice president Koehr has been observing some positive behavior patterns, which bode well for the industry’s future.

“It’s very exciting to see business returning and being there to provide a much-needed service in a world where most employees are now staying in offices during breaktimes,” he said. “Building high-quality micro market solutions is a focus to help our customers grow their teams and productivity. We continue to analyze, experiment and implement lessons learned.”

Operators in the United States did their best to adjust to and survive the severe economic ailments of the pandemic. While 2020 will be remembered as the most difficult year in the history of the modern vending industry, it will also be the year in which the micro market, a self-service store that operates in a workplace, solidified its role as the core offering in convenience services.



Legend Food Service’s snack lines are powered by Lightspeed Automation’s pick-to-light system to save time and improve “picking” accuracy.



Forklift operator Josh Abendroth transports materials at Legend’s Linthicum Heights’ warehouse.

While Legend’s micro market revenue dropped in 2020, sales at markets in 2021 so far, excluding contributions from recent acquisitions, are 30% higher over receipts in 2019. “This increase is the result of organic wins and same-location sales improvement through pricing and merchandising, among other factors,” Loughran reported.



It’s very exciting to see business returning and being there to provide a much-needed service in a world where most employees are now staying in offices during breaktimes.”

Kevin Koehr

The company’s chief revenue officer termed 2021 as “the year of the micro market” at Legend. “Our existing markets are performing extremely well as more and more people return to work, and every new market installation of 2021 is outperforming projections,” Adams told *Automatic Merchandiser*. “The industry’s transition to micro markets may have started years ago, but the pandemic has accelerated the trend, especially as more employers look to eliminate the high cost of a cafeteria.”

THE COMING OCS REVIVAL

Whereas the vending and micro market segments suffered an estimated 45% sales loss in 2020, according to

Automatic Merchandiser's latest State of the Industry report, office coffee and pantry services were hit almost twice as hard that year. AM's State of the Office Coffee Service report showed OCS sales plummeting about 75%. While almost all operators are exuberant about the potential growth of micro markets, many OCS providers across the country are wondering if their sales of office refreshment products will ever return to pre-pandemic levels. But not Legend Food Service.

"Because remote work is here to stay," Loughran said, "we don't think companies will want as much space for an increasingly remote workforce. We think, over time, this will lead to workspace consolidation and more coworking environments. As companies embrace remote work over the long haul, we do not think they will spend more on real estate than necessary."

Ironically, the shrinking need for office space could benefit the OCS business in some instances, the Legend chief executive predicted. While companies may have fewer employees in a smaller footprint, buildings will then be able to support more companies. Loughran, therefore, is anticipating greater demand for more shared OCS breakrooms.

In the meantime, U.S. employers are struggling to hire workers. "Because of the labor shortage, Nick Duda pointed out, employers need to lure workers back to the office and premium coffee and snack options are effective incentives. A reason why OCS businesses commanded premiums in terms of valuation, he noted, is because of their stability and margin profiles.

"But in the immediate post-COVID world, it's important to think critically about OCS – is it a program restart or a new program? he asked. "Are new programs more valuable because they've been established and recalibrated during the new normal? As part of an



OPERATION PROFILE

Legend Food Service

HQ No. 1: East Haven, CT

HQ No. 2: Linthicum Heights, MD (near Baltimore)

URL: legendfoodservice.com

Number of Routes: 32

Number of Commissaries: 1

Number of Acquisitions: 8

Tech/equipment providers: Avanti, Cantaloupe, Crane, Vagabond and VEI

Software providers: Avanti, Cantaloupe and Vagabond

expected return calculation, you've got to assign the probability to it; what was seen as a certainty has changed and pulled valuations down."

Duda believes that the best OCS transactions today are those with partners who are willing to share risk, which allows both operator and client to participate in the upside.

Ben Adams echoed his colleagues' thoughts on OCS. "The new office environment has obviously changed, and hybrid work models seem inevitable," he said. "On the other hand, some of the largest OCS customers – Google and Facebook, among other giant tech companies – have signed massive office leases during the pandemic, which suggests employers want employees to return, in-person. While the at-office experience may be different, these employers will be looking for new ways to retain talent and entice in-person meetings. For many of our clients, Legend's OCS products are a very easy give with an extremely high ROI, compared to other perks."

Among the recent events that an office renaissance is on the horizon,

which should provide a jolt of optimism to an industry slammed by the pandemic, Google announced last month that it plans to buy a sprawling Manhattan office building on the Hudson River. The \$2.1 billion deal would be one of the largest ever for a U.S. office building.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Depending on who you ask, some of the biggest threats facing the vending industry range from the at-home work culture, convenience stores and food delivery apps, provided by the likes of DoorDash, GrubHub and Uber Eats, to supply chain disruptions and rising product costs. When asked what he thinks, Loughran said, hands down, it's supply chain issues and inflation.

"It is just so hard to get out in the field and stay ahead of price increases and product swaps," he said. "While remote work is a challenge, we think it's temporary as office density will eventually normalize. If we can provide great and innovative products onsite, we aren't worried about delivery apps."

However, food delivery apps and convenience stores are better at passing the rising costs of technology and products onto the consumer, something vending operators have been timid about.

"Convenience services providers are hesitant to pass through their cost increases in fear of losing the business, when in fact the value of the service we provide is tremendous. That's the big difference between those providers and us," Duda explained.

"We provide the best products in the best locations – on demand – at comparable to slightly lower prices," he observed. "It's just a matter of communicating that value proposition to the customer."

"However, rather than communicate the value prop and drive improved service through investing

in technology,” Duda continued, “some operators drive their product pricing lower to keep the business. And when an operator tries to sell the business, it doesn’t matter what revenue is if the business isn’t profitable. To get the business profitable, prices need to be raised to the market positions.”

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

Three years in the industry, Nick Duda is already involved in trade association affairs at the state and national levels. In 2020, the Connecticut Vending Association elected him president. “By understanding the trend lines that legislators are acting on, we believe it’s possible to enhance our advocacy

effectiveness through a larger presence,” he said

From his perspective as CVA president, Duda believes government policy will be framed by its ability to balance the budget. “We know that cutting spending isn’t likely,” he warned, “so government will look elsewhere for tax receipts.”



Given our efficient management model, we’re able to make decisions quickly and adapt to the changing workplace as we return to whatever the new normal might be.”

Ben Adams

Additionally, he’s concerned that more needs to be done when it comes to the government’s understanding of a micro market. “Many legislators still don’t know what a micro market is, but they do understand self-checkout and it’s our job as an industry to help educate lawmakers,” Duda said. Connecticut is among the states, in the majority, whose legislature has yet to provide a clear definition of and regulations for a micro market.

There’s been some progress, though, in a dozen other states. Most recently, the Tennessee House passed a bill that clarifies the taxation, licensing and inspections of self-checkout micro markets operated in the state. By adding definition to “micro market,” “micro market display” and “untended” for purposes of sales and use taxes, operators can submit to the state’s department of revenue a single, monthly sales tax return and payment from sales made at all markets.

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PS Form 3526-R, July 2014

In Legend's second home state, Maryland, lawmakers there passed similar micro market codes and definitions in 2018.

Adult recreational cannabis legislation could also have a profound impact on vending, the CVA president said. "Here's a far-out idea, what happens when biometric identification becomes more prevalent?" Duda asked. "Do cannabis vending machines become more prevalent? I don't know and neither do lawmakers, but as an industry that can tightly monitor and maintain inventory down to a single unit, we might be best suited to ensure cannabis vending is safe and secure."

Representing both Legend and CVA, Duda was among the few New Englanders who made the trek to



Legend stocks and delivers a wide range of cold drink products.

late August's NAMA Show in New Orleans, where he met with officials from the National Automatic Merchandiser Association and other state trade groups. Incidentally, among the products that caught his attention on the NAMA show floor were 365 Retail

Market's PicoCooler, Elkay's Smartwell beverage dispenser and the Gimme Key Pro wireless DEX device.

Legend Food Service came into existence when all segments of convenience services were experiencing expansion, when conditions were ideal for growth by acquisitions and new business opportunities. Founded only two years before the pandemic ambushed the convenience services industry, and the world economy, this startup spent almost half its existence during the COVID-19 watershed. A core element of Legend's operations thesis is to apply lessons learned, and the vast knowledge and experience it gained over the past 18 months could put it on the expansion fast-track. ■

Marketplace

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in THE OFFICE



Evans Coffee

We just created a recent micro market rendering for our newest client. In this market we are going with open-air refrigeration, a product island and barista-like coffee station on the opposite wall. They cannot be more excited. All fixtures will be in black with down LED lighting that will make everything POP!



Joe Hessling Chief executive at 365 Retail Markets

One of the newest products, Pico Market, rolling off the assembly line. Way to go, Brian Stockie!

in VIEW



Corporate Coffee Systems

No matter what the situation is, Corporate Coffee Systems will do whatever it takes to fulfill a client's order. Mary recently became a grandmother and is showing how a baby stroller can be extremely versatile in procuring product. Thanks for going the extra mile, Mary! ☺☺☺

#fuelinggreatwork
#coffee #nyc



TWEET & RETWEET

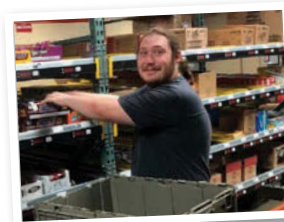


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To all of our UK, Ireland and Nordic region consumers, the OREO "Press Play To Win" campaign launched this month to bring people together with playful moments enhanced by the nostalgia of creating a mixtape. #StayPlayful with @Oreo!



FOLLOWING



Breaktime Vending

@breaktimevendingllc

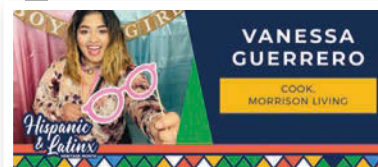
For this week's employee of the week, we want to recognize John Ritter for all of his great work for our customers! Thank you and keep up the great work, John!



The Caterer

@thecaterergroup

Don Davenport, former managing director of Sutcliffe Catering, chief executive of Compass Group's UK & Ireland division and Catey winner, has died aged 77. Visit thecaterer.com.



Compass Group @compassgroupusa

As we celebrate Hispanic & Latinx Heritage Month, we'd like you to meet one of our talented associates – Vanessa Guerrero of Morrison Living. This budding chef who discovered her love for cooking at just 13 years old celebrates her culture through her passion for food. #HispanicHeritageMonth #LatinxHeritageMonth #AltogetherGreat

Have something we shouldn't miss? Tag us or email us at editor@vendingmarketwatch.com.



It's Time to Shine

Enter Your Product into the
Products of the Year Competition

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

Product entry deadline: January 7, 2022

If you launched a NEW vending, OCS, or micro market product in 2021 and would like to enter your product(s), please send a product photo accompanied by the launch month/year and a 100-word description to editor@VendingMarketWatch.com with subject line: **POTY 2022 submission | Company Name**, no later than January 7, 2022. If you have any questions, please call Nick Montano, editor, at (646) 325-6477.

Please note that all products considered for the award MUST have been launched in 2021.

Products of the Year
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