

BottomLine



THE VOICE OF MIDWEST INDEPENDENT RETAILERS // VOL. 33, NO. 2 // FEBRUARY 2022



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pg **10**

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THE VOICE OF MIDWEST INDEPENDENT RETAILERS
VOL. 33, NO. 2 // FEBRUARY 2022

features



TAKING A BITE OUT OF CRIME: FUNDS ALLOCATED TO REDUCE BOTTLE DEPOSIT FRAUD

Many remember the 1996 Seinfeld episodes in which Kramer and Newman try to take a mail truck full of beverage containers to Saginaw, Michigan to take advantage of our state's 45-year-old deposit law. Over the past decade, a growing number of entities have found a new way to profit from the state mandate.



COVER STORY // STAYING SOCIALLY CONNECTED TO MARKET YOUR BUSINESS

Untapped may not be a social media platform widely known but it has been an effective tool for Markham Enterprise. "It is a social media platform for craft beer that helps people locate beer and rate beer they love. Best thing about Untapped is that you can post all the beers you carry in the business, and you can see special releases or products that are hard to find, and this ultimately leads people into your business."



WHAT IS GOVERNMENT RELATIONS DOING FOR ME?

We continue to live through a pandemic that is causing frustration and confusion for everyone. The recent Supreme Court ruling striking down Biden's mandate on employers was good, but it still leaves employers wondering how to best address the issue of vaccination in the workplace. This issue really reflects people's sentiments on the pandemic and how we should approach 2022.



president's message

EDWARD WEGLARZ // MIRA PRESIDENT & CEO

What do we Know About the Future?

I don't pretend to be a predictor of the future. Nor do I have a crystal ball to look into. But there are some leading indicators that can give us a rather blurred but reliable picture of the future of fuel marketing.

If we have learned anything over the past decade, it's that gasoline sales and margins are on a roller coaster ride that never ends. We continue to see New To Industry (NTI) sites being built despite the government's promotion of electric powered vehicles. I think the Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) will still be around for quite some time satisfying certain applications. And yet, for some unexplainable reason, retailers often feel the uncontrollable urge to giveaway their primary product in hopes that the motorist will come in the store and buy some item that actually produces some margin. We even see "big box" stores publish profit and loss statements with (and without) gasoline sales. Noting that the gas business is merely an expensive advertisement to attract customers. Often referred to as a "loss leader."

I believe we will continue to operate within that marketing philosophy for the foreseeable future. There will always be some marketer that wants a bigger piece of the constant, or even shrinking, retail gasoline pie. He will discount his product to increase the share, and when competitors respond with similar or even more dramatic price reductions, the downward spiral begins. Motorists do not buy more gas because it is cheaper. They have no ability to store it. They do not drive more because they paid less. But, like geometric axioms, irrational retail gasoline pricing appears to be here to stay.

So, here is what you need to know, so you can plan for the future, and survive.

There will continue to be broad competition. Many non-traditional outlets – grocery chains, even home improvement stores – will be competing for fuel business and they can afford to use gas as a loss leader.

Marketers will need to build-their-own brand. Some are abandoning branded gas to save several cents a gallon because of very slim profit margins. Motorists are also less brand-loyal and more price conscious when they can check gas prices online with their smartphone. The younger driver and leasing drivers subscribe to the philosophy that "gas is gas" and therefore consider "price" as their primary motivator when purchasing fuel. Brand loyalty is diminishing. Especially when seeing increased gasoline prices as we are seeing now.

Vending machines at the pump island are a consideration. Convenience stores are installing vending machines at the pump finding that 60-70% of customers who buy fuel never enter the store to buy higher-margin items. Soft drink machines are the most common, but some stores are promoting sandwiches and snacks.

The line between gas stations, supermarkets, convenience stores, fast food restaurants, party stores, and dollar stores is becoming very blurred. Everybody seems to be offering everything.

Just to provide an example, I was at my bank the other day and mentioned to the manager that everybody seems to be offering expanded food service. I kidded him that I truly expected to see a salad bar or some food service at his bank soon. Lo and behold, last night on TV I saw an ad for Capital Cafe that was differentiating itself from other banks by adding a café inside their bank!

If a new, unconventional concept seems a trifle "goofy" don't discount it. You may just be on the brink of the newest phenomena to sweep the industry! ■

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club mode





COVID-19 Confusion and Business Distribution Continues



■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS AND COACHING*

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, MIRA members have been considered essential workers, unlike restaurants and bars. However, they still face negative impacts. “Our members are still dealing with employee shortages,” said Ed Weglarz, MIRA president and CEO. “They have had to significantly increase the salaries of the employees they were able to retain just to retain them.”

The employee shortage across all industries is negatively impacting the food and beverage retail industry. “With so many people working from home, it is taking so much more time to get anything done,” noted Weglarz. “They don’t have information readily available because they are not all working in the same office. It’s amazing because companies and government entities don’t seem to have a tough time getting bills out to people, but all the other paperwork and information needed to operate seems to be delayed by days and week.”

Lisa Berry who has stores in Jackson, Michigan is still struggling to retain employees. “We are paying \$12 an hour. We can’t find anyone to work for minimum wage,” she said. “People just don’t want to work. I have one employee who comes up

with an excuse every few days as why she needs to take time off. I really need to replace her.”

Even though people are not receiving federal checks as they were during the height of the pandemic, independent retailers are noticing increases in state aids. “The food stamp or EBT funds have increased tremendously from what I noticed with our customers,” said Berry. “So, there is no motivation to work. I had one customer with a \$3,000 balance on their food stamps. That is incredible. It seems to have become so political. I am hearing rumors that people are selling their food stamps to other people. I don’t know how true that it is, but we do know something is going on where people can afford not to work.”

The supply chain has disrupted the ability for many grocers to properly stock their stores. “Poultry processing is disordered for instance,” explained Weglarz. “They are not providing the same cuts of poultry because the manufacturers and supplies don’t have enough employees. We have one supplier who struggles to offer rotisserie chicken, because it took too much manpower and now, he is only selling our stores owners chicken strips.”

Meal and poultry suppliers are not the only companies struggling to supply retailers. Chemical companies that sell cleaners and other items can’t get all the parts for their packaging in order to properly stock shelves. “It’s like the auto industry that has a shortage of computer chips,” said Weglarz. “We are seeing this in other industries, so the manufacturers are limiting what they are producing leaving many of members short on product.”

Berry has had suppliers who have either adjusted their route schedules

from delivering once a week to twice a month or have pulled her store off their routes completely. “We used to get Coke products delivered every week and now I have to stock double the number of pallets because they won’t deliver to us every week even though they pass by our store every week to deliver to Dollar General,” said Berry.

That is not even the worst of it for her. “The company that supplies Aunt Millie’s bread will no longer deliver to me,” she said. “Again, they are passing by my store to deliver to Dollar General, but have told me that they will not deliver to my store even though I sell so much bread that I keep an extra rack in the back during the summer months to restock it myself. I really believe there is a concerted effort to push independent retailers out of the industry.”

The association itself continues to make adjustments due to the confusion around COVID-19 protocols and new variants. “We have had to postpone and cancel events since the pandemic started,” said Weglarz. “We postponed our Annual Trade Dinner from January to October,” he said. “The new variants and increase of cases, made people nervous and so many of our vendors were not going to be able to attend. We struggled looking for a venue with an open date while trying to navigate around the wedding, communion and graduation season.”

Many of our corporate members won’t allow employees to gather in person with more than three people, so they cannot attend many of our events. Even if COVID-19 would completely slip away, we can’t pull off a major gala in a two-week time period. It takes months to prepare.

OPERATIONS
continued on page 8.

A photograph of three diverse people (two men and one woman) sitting at a table in a cafe, smiling and looking towards the left. The man on the left is holding a coffee cup. The background features exposed brick walls and industrial-style pipes.

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Moving Forward in 2022

■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS AND COACHING*

With the pandemic still pervading the country, and many parts of the world, the idea of “back to normal” or a “new normal” doesn’t seem realistic. In fact, the one constant these days is the inconsistency in the industry.

Independent retailers are still not sure what exactly to expect as they plan to move forward in 2022, but they are taking educated guesses. “As far as plans, everything hinges on the broken situation of our economy, lack of labor, a messed-up supply chain and extremely high inflation,” said Phil Kassa, co-owner of Heartland Marketplace. “We intended on remodeling one of our locations, but that will be on hold due to uncertainty regarding the costs of materials and labor.”

However, the one thing Heartland Marketplace is hoping to kick off this year is the AppCard loyalty program.

Grocery stores, c-stores and gas stations alike are all trying to figure out how to forge ahead. “We are continuing to grow our business and keep our customers happy while keeping our employees safe and healthy,” said Paul Lutfy, owner of Cloverleaf Gas Station. “We are going to stay innovative and add advanced technology with upgraded pumps and contactless sales options.”

The pandemic and political climate have made the success strategy harder to execute. “To be successful is really no different than years past,” said Kassa. “It includes customer service, quality and being competitive but all are so challenging today. The political leadership in our state and country have made it extremely difficult to be a successful small business.”

Retailers are navigating around the challenges. “We are keeping

COVID-19 safeguards in place, staying ahead of shortages, and we are stocking a larger selection of grab-and-go food options for customers since restaurants have limited hours,” said Lutfy. “Keeping up with the technology is a must.”

One of today’s challenges with a political influence is the supply chain. “It’s broken,” said Kassa. “I don’t see it getting any better when there is a shrinking labor force. In today’s world, people are not complaining so much about price, I hear them say “they have it”, meaning we have the product. The media has done a good job informing people of high food and energy inflation. As all our costs go up, we must pass these increases onto our customers, otherwise we’ll be forced out of business.”

Stores may offer less variety of items, but owners are ordering as much as they can when the products are available. “It is hard to get items, so we try to stock up when supply is available,” said Lutfy. “We try to offer a variety of related items, so customers still have options. We look at other suppliers to find the same items.”

The new variants of COVID-19 continue to impact daily operations. “The pandemic is definitely hurting us because when someone tests positive, we are even more short-handed than on a typical day,” said Kassa. “Our service levels at our stores are at an all-time low. We would be in a worse position if it weren’t that we are a family business, and we fill in and do a lot of the work. It’s been a tiring challenge.”

The virus doesn’t seem to be going away as quick as people had hoped. “We have tried to stick with the safety guidelines, so our business continues to be good,” said Lutfy. “We have had some issues with

employees being off due to illness. The office and school shutdowns do affect our fuel sales.”

Employee shortages are still a main issue for retailers today. “Our employee issues in the retail business are like they are in other businesses... challenging,” emphasized Kassa. “We have a core of associates who are always working, and go over and beyond, and take whatever available overtime, which is very much appreciated.”

The problem is that there is not enough of people to work. “We almost feel guilty asking them to step-up by taking additional shifts because it’s always the same people,” said Kassa. “We appreciate their caring for our business, but we also don’t want to burn them out. We also have associates who want to work, but when they see others calling in, or staying off work, there is much resentment, and they feel if they’re making a living staying home, then why should they work. It’s the attitude.”

Employees are expecting higher wages than what the industry can afford. “It is hard to get staff, and everyone expects to make more money,” said Lutfy. “We try to keep the staff happy by feeding them often and giving good holiday bonuses. Luckily, we have not had to reduce our hours as many places have had to do.”

There are behaviors that could be detrimental to a business if not avoided such as, “letting your guard down, having employees get sick, not keeping up with inventory and not keeping merchandise in stock,” said Lutfy. “And of course, not keeping up with the trends with merchandise.” ■

**Writers with Epiphany Communications and Coaching are content creators for the MIRA Bottom Line.*



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MICHIGAN //

Taking a Bite Out of Crime: Funds Allocated to Reduce Bottle Deposit Fraud



■ BY DEREK BAJEMA // MICHIGAN SOFT DRINK ASSOCIATION

Many remember the 1996 Seinfeld episodes in which Kramer and Newman try to take a mail truck full of beverage containers to Saginaw, Michigan to take advantage of our state's 45-year-old deposit law. Over the past decade, a growing number of entities have found a new way to profit from the state mandate. They have been trucking full beverages into Michigan from neighboring non-deposit states to sell it again here without first initiating the deposit. This deceptive

practice costs Michigan based beverage companies millions of dollars each year – robbing Michiganders of jobs and the State's unclaimed deposit fund of millions of dollars each year.

As a state surrounded by non-deposit states, we are finding beverages imported from OH, IN, IL, WI, and even Canada. Often, these operations operate out of non-descript warehouses and run the beverages into convenience and party stores throughout the state.

In 2019, unreturned deposit containers generated nearly \$43 million – a number that will be higher when we stop the fraud. 75% of the unclaimed deposit dollars (an average of \$38 million over last 5 years) is sent to the Department of Energy, Great Lakes, and Environment (EGLE) which uses the funds for employees overseeing environmental cleanup sites.

The other 25% of the unclaimed deposit fund is apportioned to retailers according to the volume of containers they redeem.

This amount obviously doesn't come close to covering retailers' costs associated with redemption but stopping importation without deposit initiation will increase the amount for retailers as well. Ending the fraud will also level the pricing playing field.

A package of bills, sponsored by Rep. Mike Mueller (R-Linden), Rep. Tim Sneller (D-Burton), Rep. Andrew Fink (R-Hillsdale) and Rep. Ty Carter (D-Detroit), make it a crime to sell carbonated beverages without first initiating the deposit; give law enforcement the tools to catch those who break the law by directing \$1 million from the State's unclaimed deposit fund to state police; and hold those performing these acts accountable by establishing financial and criminal repercussions and sentencing guidelines associated with this abuse.

The bills overwhelmingly passed the House and Senate and were signed by Governor Whitmer on December 23, 2021. We're grateful to our legislative sponsors and appreciated the support of MIRA throughout the process. ■

OPERATIONS

continued from page 4.

MIRA's 105th Annual Trade Dinner & Ball will be held at the Suburban Collection Showplace in Novi on October 8th, 2022.

There have been, and continue to be, negative affects of the pandemic such as payroll increases, supply chain issues, employee shortages, lack products on store shelves or limited number of products and the inability to offer promotions and sale items because manufacturers and suppliers are not able to offer them. However, there are some good things that have come out of COVID-19.

"This pandemic forced owners and

managers to assess their business operations and adapt as things continued to change," said Weglarz. "We also witness a new segment of the interest really grow with home deliveries and curbside pickup. I think both are here to stay. They may have decreased a bit, but customers still continue to use these two services."

Politics continue to play a role in the pandemic problems. "It's as if no one is willing to take the bull by the horn and make sound decisions," said Weglarz. It's like watching a ping pong game of back and forth and it seems like the guy who can scream the loudest is the person who makes the decision instead of the mild manner guy who actually has sound data and information."

Time is also a factor. "We can't speed

up time," said Weglarz. "Studies and research take time. It takes a woman nine months to have a baby. You can't have nine women on the job just to have a baby in one month. Certain things take time."

As the confusion around COVID-19 continues in year two of this pandemic, many are still searching for clarity. "I would love for things to get back to normal, but I just don't think that will happen," said Berry. "This pandemic has gotten just too political. It's getting harder and harder to be an independent retailer."

"I never thought it would have gone on this long," said Weglarz. "We are scheduling events further out in 2023 and 2024, because we really don't know what is going to happen." ■

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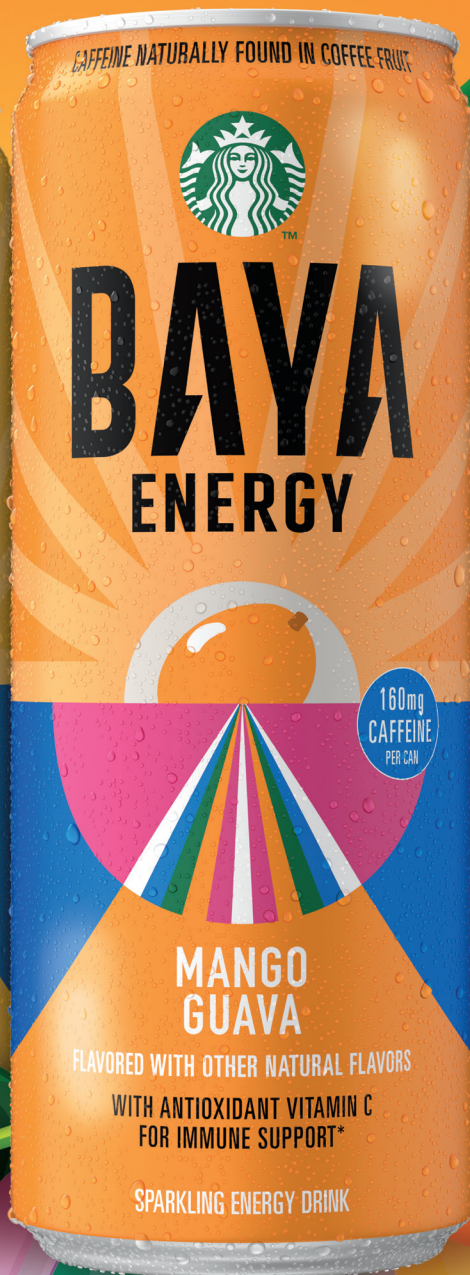
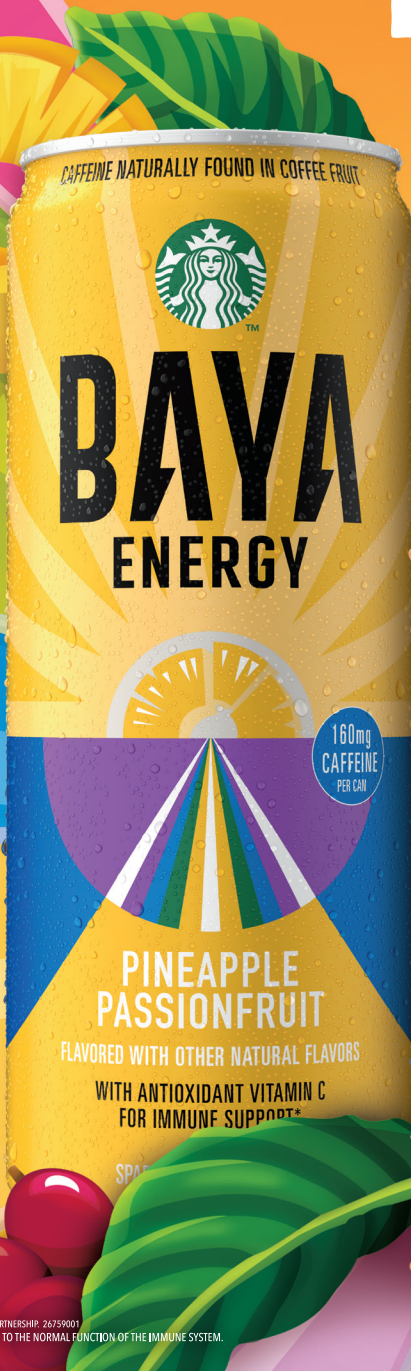


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Staying Socially Connected to Market your Business

■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS AND COACHING*

Untapped may not be a social media platform widely known, but it has been an effective tool for Markham Enterprise. “It is a social media platform for craft beer that helps people locate beer and rate beer they love,” said Daniel Mitchell, General Manager. “Best thing about Untapped is that you can post all the beers you carry in the business, and you can see special releases or products that are hard to find, and this ultimately leads people into your business.”

It was about 10 years ago when social media emerged as businesses’ number one way to connect with consumers, according to a new study called the *Harris Poll*, conducted by Sprout Social, a social media listening and analytics company.

Markham Enterprise also uses Facebook, but Untapped has become the go-to platform for their business. “I personally use social media to stay in the loop,” said Mitchell. “I research new products and pay attention to what people are talking about, what’s the latest buzz on the street, the next new thing.”

A challenge with social media is keeping people engaged, noted Mitchell. “Getting people to like and share your posts is not easy.”

“Using effective social media marketing often requires more tech savvy business owners and a lot of the older generation only have entry level skills with a computer,” said Delone Yelda, with Great Supermarket in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



The *Harris Poll* surveyed more than 1,000 U.S. consumers and 250 business executives to better understand how they use social media and its impact on an organization. From increasing investment to using social data to inform opportunities outside of marketing, businesses are doubling down on social media following a year of accelerated transformation.

More than 70% of businesses surveyed rely on social media for customer engagement, compared with 61% for email, 27% for TV/radio advertising and 24% for print ads.

The findings include:

- 91% of executives anticipate their company's social media marketing budget will increase over the next three years, and the majority expect it will increase by more than 50%.
- 85% of executives report that social data will be a primary source of business intelligence for their company moving forward.
- 78% of consumers are more willing to buy from a brand and 77% will choose a brand over a competitor after a positive experience with a brand on social media.

With that research in mind, there are some must do's in 2022 for retailers to be successful when it comes their social media marketing efforts. "Most people consuming social media are "opting in", as in they like you already and are interested in what you have to say," said Dr. Russell J. Zwanka, Food Marketing Director and associate professor at Western Michigan University. "So, you need to take advantage of that and make sure you have a decent flow of engagement and interaction. Do not hard sell! It's engagement, like ping pong, not "here's what's on sale this week". Social interaction goes out, comes back, goes out, comes back."

Social media platforms have grown in the last decade as well and each has a different style and target audience. "The best platforms are all of them," said Dr. Zwanka. "Each site has a different demographic who needs to be engaged. Use filters for Snapchat, talk about recipes on Instagram, talk about how you're engaging the community on Facebook. Facebook is the closest to a regular website than the rest and use Reddit for recipes hooked to an order system, etc."

Mitchell has plans for his social media strategy for 2022 which includes continuing to use Untapped. It is a subscription-based service, but anyone can go on the platform without a subscription. "If you are a verified venue, the

FOOD EXPERTS THAT THE INDUSTRY FOLLOWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media allows food bloggers to reach larger audiences. No doubt many people spend time every day online, and it can help catch the attention of brands or other potential partnerships.

Often chefs will share recipes and introduce foods that people around the world may have never tried. They are also feature trends and seasonal products. These features can benefit food and beverage retailers as they research the best products to feature in their stores or create displays with recipes and ingredients.

There are specific food and beverage experts that retailers are and could benefit from following. As referenced in the cover story this month. Dr. Russell Zwanka from Western Michigan University, share what he recommends food retailers should follow.

Chef Gordon Ramsay has built a significant platform using television, print media, selling cookbooks, opening restaurants in at least a dozen countries and endorsing cooking appliances. His website serves as a platform of all kinds of information and updates about the food industry.

Eric Ripert website "*Avec Eric*" says that this website "provides an insider's view of the professional life and lifestyle of one of the greatest chefs in the world today. Each episode is a journey from restaurant to the source of inspiration to your own home. We learn from the work and life of a master chef while he teaches us how to achieve four-star simplicity and elevate our own food experiences."

Dr. Zwanka indicated that Dr. Oz and Oprah been more responsible for trends than many actual chefs.

A quick internet search and you can find many lists of best bloggers and vloggers on all the social media platforms. There is a website called American's Best Food Blogs (www.americanfoodbloggers.com) that list their choice of best food bloggers for 2022. They list each bloggers global rank as well as rank in the country. The site also includes the bloggers latest posts.

Perhaps, retailers could consider how to shares these blogs and vlogs on their social media platforms while marketing products feature.

INFLUENCER MARKETING HUB'S 17 BEST FOOD BLOGS TO FOLLOW IN 2022:

- Love and Lemons
- Cookie and Kate
- Minimalist Baker
- Smitten Kitchen
- 101 Cookbooks
- Budget Bytes
- Closet Cooking
- Damn Delicious
- Green Kitchen Stories
- Serious Eats
- Sprouted Kitchen
- Two Peas & Their Pod
- Pinch of Yum
- Sailu's Food
- Chocolate Covered Katie.
- Vegan Richa
- Recipe Girl

TIKTOK FOOD CREATORS

EatNom is a food media platform built for diverse chefs, cooks, foodies and food creatives. They published their list of TikTok food creators that you should follow:

- The Sweet Impact (@thesweetimpact)
- Cheese Daily (@cheesedaily)
- Toyosi Sule (@toyosisule)
- Asili Glam Cooks (@asiliglamcooks)
- Season That Ish (@seasonthatish)
- Cord And The Kitchen (@cordandthekitchen)
- One Great Vegan (@onegreatvegan)
- I Am Darius Cooks (@iamdariuscooks)
- Feed The Malik (@feedthemalik)
- Gabby Jaye (@gabby.jaye)

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platform puts you on the top of list,” said Mitchell. “This enables you to add your products and engage customers. You can gain traction and market your products.”

The platform also allows Mitchell to research the industry and the products suppliers are promoting. “I can target a 15-mile radius from my store, and I can research the top 10 beers,” he said. There are so many products out there, and with social media, I can narrow down what I want to carry in the store. We have only so much shelf space and we have to be strategic.”

Yelda primarily uses Facebook. “We are currently using Facebook to post ads, specials, feature new items and in-store giveaways,” he said. “We boost a post with a link to our website that features our weekly specials with Facebook Ads. We set a target audience within 25 miles of the store and decide a weekly budget. We also have text blast that delivers a weekly text with our sale ad.”

There are food and beverage bloggers or influencers that retailers could follow and that Dr. Zwanka has his marketing eyes on. “Besides the usual Gordon Ramsay and Eric Ripert, I would suggest you follow Dr. Oz and Oprah. Oz and Oprah have been more responsible for trends than many actual chefs,” he said.

“I follow a ton of food and beverage bloggers,” said Mitchell. “I start with the distributors we use,” said Mitchell. “I follow our companies that supply us products to give me a chance to see what is new. You can’t just depend on your sales representative. You need to follow them on social media; it is part of doing the research.”

Social media and the internet have a tremendous influence on retail marketing abilities and success. “It moves quicker, and also allows for a quicker response time,” said Dr. Zwanka. “The best example ever, has still been the Oreo social posting when the lights went out during the Super Bowl. TikTok has an incredible influence, and powerful algorithm, when it comes to trends. Last year was hot chocolate bombs, right now it’s crab rangoon.”

If you’re not doing your research and creating a strategy, retailers are apt to make social media mistakes. “The top mistake is monitoring social sites only during normal business hours,” explained Dr. Zwanka. “Everyone has a phone in their hand, and they are usually shopping outside of 8-5 Monday through Friday, so someone on the social team needs to be monitoring the sites and interacting during all operating hours. And, like I said earlier, don’t use social

sites as a hard sell. Talk about what you are doing in the community, talk about the big storm coming, celebrate your frontline workers, etc.”

Mitchell suggests having a plan. “I don’t use the platforms to just post and market, I do a lot of research. I think people are making the mistake of not using social media platforms properly,” he said. “You can’t just set up a page and randomly post and think you are going to attract customers. You really need to tap into all the resources on the internet if you want to grow your business.”

Yelda notes that a mistake he notices people making with social media is not posting enough. “Customers respond most to active social media platforms and a lot of business owners will start advertising and promoting and then stop,” he said. “Consistency is key. Also, business owners often advertise too far away from their business.”

Yelda has used social media to update the community about food shortage updates due to COVID-19. “We also showcase local vaccine locations and upcoming community events,” he said. He also recognizes strategies that are not so successful. “Posting on social media platforms with organic posts has not been nearly as effective as paid ads,” he said. “Successful organic posts require a lot of followers and that takes time. You can set a budget and start small, track your engagements, and decide from there how much you want to spend.”

“In 2022, Yelda plans to feature social media exclusive sales. “A daily item special priced for customers who interact with the social media post, such as a like or comment. This will drive social media engagement and promote the store to new customers,” he said.

There also must be a balance between interest and completing the sale. “If someone sees a recipe they like, offer to “push this button” and order it for them, noted Dr. Zwanka. “TikTok is scary and good all at the same time. Like Snapchat was five years ago, retailers need to figure it out, or at least monitor it for trends.”

“If you want people to be attracted to your social media platform, it must stand out,” said Yelda. “Use big pictures, videos, and emojis. Add clickable maps for directions and always include your phone number, so that customers can reach your business.” ■

**Writers with Epiphany Communications and Coaching are content creators for Bottom Line.*



government relations report

JUAN ESCAREÑO // MIRA DIRECTOR, GOVERNMENT RELATIONS & COMMUNITY OUTREACH

What is Government Relations Doing for Me?

"The whole modern world has divided itself into Conservatives and Progressives. The business of Progressives is to go on making mistakes. The business of the Conservatives is to prevent the mistakes from being corrected."

– GK. CHESTERTON

We continue to live through a pandemic that is causing frustration and confusion for everyone. The recent Supreme Court ruling striking down Biden's mandate on employers was good, but it still leaves employers wondering how to best address the issue of vaccination in the workplace. This issue really reflects people's sentiments on the pandemic and how we should approach 2022. Many in Michigan and Ohio are free of the COVID-19 protocols but in Illinois, the requirement to wear mask and show proof of vaccination to eat in public is still in effect.

During these times new rules are being proposed and new patterns in retail are being created. The industry will never be the same. At MIRA, we will continue to be vigilant and ensure your business is not disproportionately disadvantaged.

The following updates are repeats for some who read this magazine religiously, for others, it will serve as an archive for them to go back and read what we did in the future.

MICHIGAN:

- We worked with the MLCC to reintroduce a half-mile rule for municipalities. Barring any opposition, the proposed rule may go into effect in late 2022.
- We actively oppose expanding the bottle bill and continue to defend against the constant effort to add water bottles.
- Working to stop ghost retailers from undercutting

brick and mortar stores in the delivery of alcohol. Legislation will be introduced soon to ensure delivery is not done with independent contractors. This would hinder Amazon like operations from undercutting our members.

- Stopped unattended gas stations. This would have allowed Walmart and Costco to run their gas stations with zero employees.
- We are actively working to stop the increase in the motor fuel tax.
- We have good relationships with the MLCC, USDA, and WIC to help our retailers get quick answers.

ILLINOIS:

- We are actively worked on amending the Fair Work Week Ordinance in Chicago. We continue to monitor the ordinance and ensured the pandemic variance was implemented.
- We have a growing list of aldermen in the City of Chicago that work with us on getting answers for our members.
- We are actively working with the Cook County Commissioners to enact a tax abatement policy for stores in food deserts. We project this saving independent retailers will help stores expand, remodel, and train employees.
- We spearheaded the Link Match pilot program in supermarkets. This program is bringing thousands of dollars for marketing to participating stores and expanding the purchase amounts of customers on EBT.

OHIO:

- We supported legislation to stop municipalities from passing anti-plastic bag laws.
- We stopped Ohio from expanding the tobacco tax
- We are actively working to stop the increase in the motor fuel tax.
- We have good relationships with the legislative leadership so we can help our retailers get quick answers.

NATIONAL

- We actively participate in a national coalition of retail trade associations working to have anti-trust laws enforced so that our members can compete with big box stores.
- We actively participate in a national coalition opposing the vaccine mandate on our retail members. ■

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c-store news & views

JIM GREEN // MIRA VICE PRESIDENT, PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Mergers and Acquisitions

2021 was another busy year for merger and acquisition (M&A) in the convenience store channel. It was a year in which we saw the largest acquisition in convenience store history where 7-Eleven Inc. completed its \$21 billion acquisition of the Speedway convenience store chain from Marathon Petroleum. This acquisition dominated the news and may have overshadowed much of the other M&A activity that took place in 2021. If you missed it, there was a flurry of M&A movement in the fourth quarter where it seemed as though you could not go more than a day or two without reading an industry announcement about an acquisition. This trend will only continue in 2022.

Most of the companies being acquired were small to midsize chains. Its easy to understand why large chains are making these acquisitions. They have access to cheap money and as they expand and consolidate, they bring better economies of scale. The biggest question independent operators need to ask themselves is, "Why are the owners of these small and midsize chains selling?" There are many reasons why retailers are selling. I classify them in two unique buckets. The first is for personal reasons and the second is the changing retail landscape. The changing retail landscape factors are the ones that independent retailers need to closely examine.

Since most of the transactions were private, the purchase prices and multiples were not reported. Trends lead industry experts to believe multiples have remained strong and it is common to see multiples based on store level EBITDA for the previous 12 months to be in the high single digits. So many owners see this simply as

the perfect time to cash out. Other owners are just worn out and just want to monetize their business. Many are second and third generation that have no succession plan. These are all personal decisions every operator faces or may face in the future. The changing retail landscape factors cited by owners that sold are the issues every independent retailer needs to be concerned about and actively working to address. The first one is investing into technology. This is more than using a back-office system and reporting your tobacco data. Independent convenience store retailer should be looking at adopting solutions like curbside and delivery, mobile ordering, and frictionless checkout. Another reason is the capital expenditure needed to do food service correctly. Large chains are only improving their made-to-order menus and now starting to implement drive-thru. Consumer foodservice expectations are also significantly higher than they were just a decade ago. The uncertain future with fuel demand and the adoption of electric vehicles is another reason. I have written on this subject previously and there are various models that retailers can evaluate. My personal belief is that every operator should be planning on their fuel volumes to be 50% to 60% of what they currently are in the next 10 years. Cigarettes are back on track to continue to decline at 3%- 4% per year which are a major foot traffic driver for convenience stores. These are realities every independent operator must recognize and be willing to evolve to overcome them.

I hate to say it, but I was not encouraged by the recent 2022 NACS/NielsenIQ *Convenience Industry Store Count*. It only validated the challenges that exist with the changing retail landscape. It showed a 1.5% decrease in the number of convenience stores from a year earlier. What was extremely alarming was a 3.1% decrease in single-store operators. The only solution is to invest in technology and foodservice! It is not going to be easy but the longer you wait, the harder it will be. Start today! ■



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michigan liquor report

PAT GAGLIARDI // CHAIR, MICHIGAN LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION

Moderation – A Heart Healthy Choice

February is American Heart Month.* Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. More than 800,000 people in the U.S. die from cardiovascular disease each year — that's one in every three deaths. About 160,000 of them occur in people under age 65. It will most likely remain the #1 cause of death in the U.S. despite COVID-19.**

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that at least 200,000 deaths each year from cardiovascular disease *could be prevented* with healthy lifestyle changes to help reduce such risk factors as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, smoking, diabetes, and excessive alcohol use.

The Michigan Liquor Control Commission (MLCC) joins with the American Heart Association (AHA) in urging moderation in alcohol consumption and increasing awareness of the potential effects of alcohol on the heart. Here are a few points to consider.

Research findings on alcohol and heart health can be confusing, if not contradictory. Some studies have shown that those who drink *moderate* amounts of alcohol — no more than one drink a day for women and two for men, as recommended by the AHA — have lower rates of heart disease than nondrinkers. The AHA considers a drink to be one 12 oz. beer, 4 oz. of wine, 1.5 oz. of 80-proof spirits or 1 oz. of 100-proof spirits.

The connection between moderate drinking and lower risk of cardiovascular disease has been observed in men and women. However, no research has proved a cause-and-effect link between drinking alcohol and *better* heart health. The best-known positive health effect of alcohol is a small increase in HDL, or good cholesterol.

Drinking alcohol every day *to excess* can lead to serious cardiovascular disease risks including high blood pressure, obesity, and stroke. Heavy drinking may also prematurely age arteries over time, particularly in men, when compared to moderate drinkers

Drinking too much alcohol can raise the levels of some fats in the blood known as triglycerides. A high triglyceride level combined with high LDL (bad) cholesterol or low HDL (good) cholesterol has been associated with fatty buildup in the artery walls. That, in turn, can increase the risk of heart attack and stroke.

Binge drinking — having five or more drinks in two hours for men or four or more drinks for women — significantly increases the risk for an irregular heartbeat — atrial fibrillation, (AFib) a dangerous heart rhythm disorder that can lead to blood clots, stroke or heart failure in individuals *who have never been diagnosed with it before*, according to a recent study.

This month is a good time to become heart smart when it comes to alcohol consumption. If you do drink, talk with your doctor about the benefits and risks of consuming alcohol in moderation. Learn about alcohol's impact on the heart and personal risk factors such as high blood pressure, heart failure, cardiomyopathy, irregular heart rhythm, high triglycerides, or a history of stroke or diabetes.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist about any potential interactions with high blood pressure medications, cholesterol-lowering drugs, or common prescription heart medications such as alpha blockers, beta blockers, or vasodilators such as nitroglycerine. Ask if it's safe to drink alcohol in moderation if taking an aspirin regularly.

After having triple by-pass heart surgery six years ago, I made healthy lifestyle changes a priority to protect and promote a healthy heart. Now is the best time to learn your health history, eat a healthy diet, move more and sit less, quit smoking, take medicines as directed, monitor your blood pressure at home, and rethink your drink.

Of course, not everyone who drinks will develop heart problems. But as the debate goes on about whether alcohol is good or bad for hearts, we do know that too much is certainly harmful. ■

* President Lyndon B. Johnson, among the millions of people in the country who had heart attacks, issued the first proclamation in 1964. Since then, U.S. presidents have annually declared February American Heart Month.

** According to the American Heart Association and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Other sources: Harvard School of Public Health – Alcohol: Balancing Risks and Benefits; Cleveland Clinic; University of California, San Francisco, news release, Jan. 12, 2022.

The mission of the Michigan Liquor Control Commission (MLCC) is to make alcoholic beverages available for consumption while protecting the consumer and the general public through regulation of those involved in the sale and distribution of these alcohol beverage products.

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ohio lobbyist report

TERRY FLEMING // TC FLEMING & ASSOCIATES

Hopefully A Better Year Ahead For All

The first thing Ohio MIRA members need to know is about the changes to minimum wage. The minimum wage for non-tipped employees has increased from \$8.80 per hour to \$9.30 for 2022. Minimum wage for tipped employees has moved from \$4.40 to \$4.65. The change impacts employees of businesses with annual gross receipts of more than \$342,000 per year. The minimum wage remains \$7.25 per hour for employees at companies with annual gross receipts \$342,000 or less after January 1st, as well as for 14 and 15 year old's.

Another thing MIRA members should know about is a new law in effect that would allow 19 to 18 year old's serve alcohol. This law becomes effective on March 22, 2022.

Ohio has a two-year General Assembly so all bills not passed in 2021 carry over to 2022. Among the many bills pending are: HB 31, dealing with accessible parking; HB 47, which provides grants for electric vehicle charging

stations; HB 165, which provides a tax credit for the use of high-ethanol blend in motor fuel; HB 234, the repeal of the Commercial Activity tax; HB 435, which would prohibit government and businesses from requiring vaccinations for employment; and SB 9, which reduces the number of state regulations.

This year is also a statewide election year, with two seats open in the Ohio Supreme Court and all 15 congressional districts. Also all 99 Ohio House of Representative seats are up as well as 17 Ohio Senate seats and an open U.S. Senate seat as well. All 5 statewide offices are also open, Governor, Auditor, Attorney General, Treasurer, and Secretary of State. The Ohio House of Representatives, Ohio Senate and congressional races are all in new districts. Currently the Ohio Supreme Court is hearing challenges to the new districts map that was drawn up by majority Republicans. The Court must act by end of January as filing deadlines for all races is in February to be on the May primary ballot.

Once the districts are approved and primary elections end, the November general elections are next and don't expect the legislature to do much in this election year. Once again I pray that 2022 is a better year for all than 2021. ■

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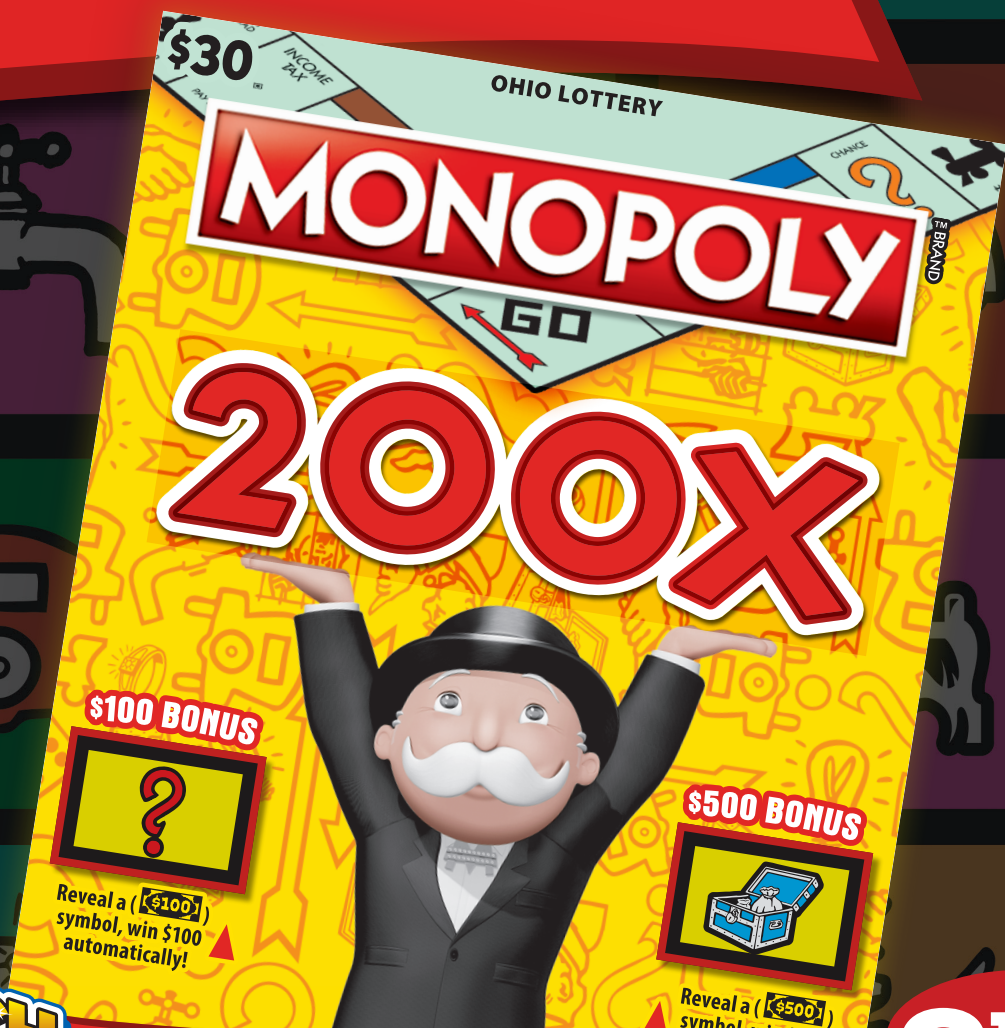
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Evolving to a Remote World Keeps the Job Fresh and Interesting

■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS AND COACHING*

In his industry, there is no real time off. “Politics can happen at any time,” said Curt Fiedler, Principal/Government Relations with Morrill and Fiedler, LLC. He works with MIRA’s government relations team as the lobbyist in Illinois.

Despite the demands, he does carve out time to relax and recharge. “I try to work out every morning just to clear my head and keep up with my two teenage sons.”

Fiedler’s career as a lobbyist began after he graduated with his bachelor’s degree in political science from Olivet Nazarene University in Bourbonnais, Illinois. At the end of his junior year, he was introduced to the Legislative Internship Program, a paid internship that is part of a master’s program offered by the University of Illinois – Springfield.

The application and selection process into the program included a 90-minute interview process before the directors of each of the four legislative caucus. He was selected into the program and after graduating Olivet in 2000, he began the UIS master’s program and interned for the House Republican Research Staff in the fall of 2000; he was trained to draft and analyze legislative proposals, as well as staff legislative committees and support legislative debate on the House floor.

Following the internship, Fiedler was hired to the full-time position of Legislative Analyst and became a Senior Analyst in 2005, primarily handling issues relating to taxation, economic development and state budget appropriations.

“During my time as a Legislative Analyst, I excelled in developing strong relationships with legislators, many of them leaders and fellow staff colleagues – relationships that now span more than 20 years and that transverse a multitude of positions within the current Illinois political arena,” he said.

In September 2006, Fiedler was hired by the firm Morrill & Associates to become a Government Relations Associate to begin his career as a contract lobbyist. “I have been provided the opportunity to work on a



variety of issues for a variety of clients, and develop professional and personal relationships with Governors, legislators, and staff over the more than 20 years I’ve worked in the Illinois legislative arena,” note Fiedler. “In 2018, Steve Morrill and I became partners to transform Morrill & Associates to Morrill & Fiedler and we continue to represent clients with the highest level of professionalism and strongest relationships within all levels of Illinois state government.”

Fiedler points to many aspects with his job including the relationships developed with colleagues and clients. “Many times, they turn into true friendships,” said Fiedler, “the ones in which we understand each other even when we disagree on an issue. On top of that, the issues are never the same every year – there is always something new to learn and work on which keeps the job fresh and interesting.”

Overall, he finds the job immensely enjoyable, “I have the opportunity to resolve an issue in the most simple and straightforward manner by putting two friends together, cutting through the noise, and resolve the matter in one meeting,” he said. “Without developing the relationships and proving your professionalism on multiple issues over the years, it is impossible to get to the stage of finding simple solutions.”

His work with MIRA has involved several issues. “The best part of working with MIRA are the people they represent. They are no-nonsense, get-the-work-done-right type of people, and they work for those communities they serve.”

He noted that MIRA members are people most directly engaged in their neighborhoods, “that is a strength that I really enjoy helping them tap in to and



grow. The term ‘all politics is local’ is very true and, in Illinois, MIRA is still learning how best to harness that, and I’m grateful to help foster that voice.”

This pandemic has created new challenges. “The greatest challenge is COVID-19 in the sense that it has forced our profession – one that traditionally relies on the “personal touch” of meetings and events – to evolve to a remote world. This is where developing strong relationships over many years is our advantage – as we can still easily connect via virtual meetings, calls, texts and emails that are not lost in the shuffle,” said Fiedler. “Maintaining those relationships, and building newly elected officials, in a new remote working environment is the biggest challenge lobbyists face today.”

There are several issues percolating for the industry in 2022 that has Fiedler and his team’s attention. In Illinois, they are focused on two primary objectives: advancing measures to reduce food disparities and food deserts in urban communities (particularly Cook County and Chicago); and working with the City to understand the practical obstacles and solutions to COVID-19 mandates and proposed regulations on our industry. “Grocery stores, especially the small and mid-sized independent stores that are closest to the local communities, are essential to the citizens in every district or ward of an elected official,” he said. “If they increase regulations and administrative burdens too high, the stores will no longer be able to afford to stay open – impacting local revenues, causing job loss, and reducing access to fresh food. It is all connected, and that is why we are working to enact incentives for the local grocery stores while working to fight off burdensome regulations.”

Fiedler is currently working on an article for the March issue of *Bottom Line* that will focus on midterm elections. He is still fleshing out the details but will primarily focus on what to expect and prepare for as an industry in terms of mid-term elections.

In Illinois, they changed the law to delay the 2022 primaries until June 28th due to COVID-19 and redistricting; the general election is still planned for November 2022. There is lots of political maneuvering regarding Illinois races – both federal and state races. “Also, because it is a redistricting year, all five statewide offices and all 177 state legislative offices are up for election,” said Fiedler.

In addition, Illinois’ Governor, JB Pritzker, is up for re-election in 2022, “and while there have been four announced GOP candidates so far there will be at least one more that will have the support of Ken Griffin who has announced he wants to see the GOP take back the Governor’s office,” said Fiedler.

Despite the a long list of “to do’s,” Fiedler still finds



time for family and fun. “I play a lot of basketball – including a weekly pick-up game in Springfield with legislators during session,” he said. “My family and I are road-trippers and we usually take 1-2 road trips to different states every year.” Their goals includes visiting all 48 intercontinental states with some favorites on their bucket list.

Fiedler also helps coach his sons in both basketball and baseball. “My focus today is on providing them opportunities as the oldest is in college studying to be an engineer and the youngest is about to start high school sports next year,” he said.

Along with focusing family and fun during his downtime, Fiedler also makes room for his faith. “I am an Lder at our local church and we are very involved in providing a place people feel welcome and safe.” ■

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MONEY ORDERS

 Retailers Express Money Orders 1-800-666-6233

MORTGAGE LENDERS

National Mortgage Home Loans (248) 864-2200

OFFICE SUPPLIES & PRODUCTS

 Office Depot (855) 337-6811



PAYROLL SERVICES

 ConnectPay Payroll Services (248) 594-6900




PET SUPPLIES MISC.

 Great Lakes Pet Treats (810) 715-4500

PIZZA SUPPLIERS

 Omni Food Concepts   1-888-367-7829
 Hunt Brothers Pizza (615) 259-2629

POINT OF SALE & RETAIL TECHNOLOGY

 Great Lakes Data Systems (LOC Software) (248) 356-4100 ext. 107
 Petrosoft LLC (412) 306-0640
 Success Systems/Smokin' Rebates .. 1-800-653-3345
 BMC-Business Machines Company (517) 485-1732

PRINTING, PUBLISHING & SIGNAGE

 Saxon, Inc.  (248) 398-2000
 Ahearn Signs, Inc. (734) 699-3777
 EGI Solutions (586) 978-9630
 Pace Custom Printing. (248) 563-7702

PRODUCE DISTRIBUTORS

Anthony Marano Company (773) 321-7500

PROPANE

 Tank Traders Midwest (877) 429-5797
 Planet Propane (248) 647-0000

REAL ESTATE

 Sell Your Business Program 1-800-666-6233

REFRIGERATION SOLUTIONS (COMMERCIAL)

Raves Cooler Doors (248) 887-0648


RETAIL FIXTURES, DISPLAYS & FLOORING

 Display Max (810) 494-0400

REVERSE VENDING MACHINES & SERVICE

UBCR, LLC (248) 529-2605

SECURITY, SURVEILLANCE & MORE

 Defense Alarm Systems. (586) 777-7222
 Netco Services (248) 850-2228

SODA POP, WATER, JUICES & OTHER BEVERAGES

 Coca-Cola Refreshments (Metro Detroit program)
 Metro Detroit  (313) 868-2008
 Belleville  (734) 397-2700
 Flint  (810) 237-4000
 Cleveland  (216) 690-2653
 Faygo Beverages, Inc.  (313) 925-1600
 Monster Energy Company (800) 426-7367
 Pepsi Beverages Detroit 1-800-368-9945
 Howell 1-800-878-8239
 Pontiac (248) 334-3512
 Cleveland (216) 252-7377
 Twinsburg (330) 963-5300

TOBACCO ALTERNATIVES

Swisher International (904) 607-7405

TOBACCO COMPANIES & PRODUCTS

Altria Client Services (513) 831-5510
 PMI Global Services Inc. (810) 923-9732
 R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company (336) 741-0727

WASTE DISPOSAL & RECYCLING

Commercial Waste Systems (Cardboard recycling buyers)
 (219) 663-5678
 Midwest Recycling (Clothing recycle boxes) (313) 304-9099

WINE & SPIRITS COMPANIES

Benchmark Beverage Co. (734) 744-6132
 Cornerstone Wine Distributor (586) 839-2552
 Endless West (313) 590-7491
 Heaven Hill Brands (248) 885-5664
 Luxco (313) 333-4637
 Proximo Spirits (810) 278-0599
 Tito's Handmade Vodka (248) 885-3424

WINE & SPIRITS DISTRIBUTORS

Great Lakes Wine & Spirits 1-888-860-3805
 RNDC of Michigan 1-888-697-6424

FOOD RESCUE / FOOD BANKS

MICHIGAN

Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank
 (616) 784-3250
 Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank -
 Benton Harbor (269) 926-2646
 Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank -
 Cadillac (231) 779-0056
 Food Bank of Eastern Michigan (810) 239-4441
 Food Bank of South Central Michigan .. (269) 964-3663
 Food Gatherers (734) 761-2796
 Forgotten Harvest (248) 967-1500
 Gleaners Community Food Bank (866) GLE-ANER
 Greater Lansing Food Bank (517) 908-3680
 Kalamazoo Loaves & Fishes (269) 343-3663
 The Manna Food Project (231) 347-8852
 Western Upper Peninsula Food Bank ... (906) 482-5528

OHIO

Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank (330) 535-6900
 Cleveland Foodbank (216) 738-2265
 Freestore Foodbank (513) 482-3663
 Mid-Ohio Foodbank (614) 277-FOOD
 SE Ohio Foodbank & Kitchen (740) 767-4500
 Second Harvest Food Bank of Clark, Champaign and
 Logan Counties (937) 325-8715
 Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio
 (440) 960-2265
 Second Harvest Food Bank of the Mahoning Valley
 (330) 792-5522
 Shared Harvest Foodbank (513) 874-0114
 The Foodbank, Inc. (937) 461-0265
 Toledo Northwestern Ohio Food Bank ... (419) 242-5000
 West Ohio Food Bank (419) 222-7946

ILLINOIS

Central Illinois Foodbank (217) 522-4022
 Eastern Illinois Foodbank (217) 328-3663
 Greater Chicago Food Depository (773) 247-3663
 Northern Illinois Foodbank (630) 443-6910
 Peoria Area Food Bank (309) 671-3906
 River Bend Foodbank (563) 345-6490
 St. Louis Area Foodbank (314) 292-6262
 Tri-State Foodbank (812) 425-0775



— REBATES —
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Details:

New & current customers are eligible for the following rebates:

- 2% Non-Tobacco/Non-Cigarette
- Additional 1% on Energy Supplements (Total of 3%)
- Additional 2% on Foodservice products (Total of 4%)
- Additional 2% on Supplies (Total of 4%)

Requirements:

Customer must purchase the following categories:

- Cigarettes
- OTP
- Energy Supplements
- Supplies
- Coffee (If offered by retail operator)

Customer needs to average \$3,500 in total weekly purchases

Customer needs to purchase 12 out of the 13 weeks per quarter

Customer must maintain good credit standing

• TOTAL VALUE TO YOU •

\$1,350

Estimated Rebate*
(Annual Total Paid Quarterly)

\$2,000

**Est. MIRA Member
Program Savings**

\$3,350

**Total Member Benefits
PER LOCATION**

* Based on \$1,000 non-tobacco purchases weekly

**For more information on Team Sledd, call the office at 800.333.0374
or E-mail Sheila Reilly at SReilly@TeamSledd.com**

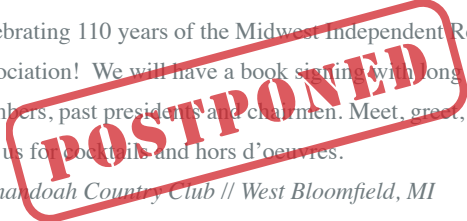


MARCH 10, 2022

HISTORY BOOK VOL. 2 SIGNING

Celebrating 110 years of the Midwest Independent Retailers Association! We will have a book signing with long time members, past presidents and chairmen. Meet, greet, and join us for cocktails and hors d'oeuvres.

Shenandoah Country Club // West Bloomfield, MI



MARCH 29, 2022

MIRA'S 35TH ANNUAL INNOVATIONS BUYING SHOW

MIRA's longest running trade show has retailers looking to fill their shelves for the spring and summer months.

The Annual Innovations Buying Show is known for high-quality attendees, non-stop interaction and exhibitor satisfaction. Admission for MIRA members is free. Must be at least 21 years old to attend this show.

Andiamo Warren Banquet Center // Warren, MI



MAY 20, 2022

MIRA'S 3RD ANNUAL CHICAGO METRO GROCERS GALA

With a "Saturday Night Fever" theme, enjoy fine cuisine, network, dance and enjoy live entertainment with more than 500 industry leaders. Black tie recommended.

Sponsorship opportunities available.

The Empress // Addison, IL



JUNE 14, 2022

MIDWEST INDEPENDENT RETAILERS FOUNDATION'S 14TH ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIP LUNCHEON

Every year, the Midwest Independent Retailers Foundation awards academic scholarships in the amount of \$1,500 each to extraordinary and deserving students in Michigan, Ohio and Illinois. Help the MIR Foundation invest in the leaders of tomorrow. Tickets and sponsorship opportunities available.

Detroit Athletic Club// Detroit, MI

publishers statement

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For more information visit liparifoods.com

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Joe_Calo@liparifoods.com