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**Thanks to MNB
for this selection of
articles.**

Fred Meyer Sees The Future In Canvas, Reusable Shopping Bags

SeattlePI.com reports that as Kroger-owned Fred Meyer eliminates the use of plastic bags in its Portland, Oregon stores, it is doing so with the firm conviction that eventually it will be a chain-wide initiative.

"We're doing it because we felt like it was inevitable," said Melinda Merrill, a spokeswoman for Fred Meyer, tells the website. "That's why we decided to get ahead of it."

Merrill also notes that it is easier for a company to deal with one set of rules, as opposed to a patchwork of regulations. "If Seattle has a ban and Everett has a fee and Redmond has a different fee, it's really hard to implement," she says. "We would screw that up."

Sansolo Speaks: "Hitting the Right Notes"

by Michael Sansolo

In a world of value, where bigger, larger and more seem always to work, is it possible that less can be better? I think we recently got an easy and powerful lesson in just that concept, not to mention how more can sometimes be too much.

Think back to the recently completed World Cup soccer tournament and ask yourself this: Do you remember the vuvuzela?

I'm betting you do. For even if you caught only a second of a single game, you heard the vuvuzela. They are those annoying horns you heard buzzing loudly in the background of every broadcast. Apparently a single vuvuzela played properly can produce a somewhat pleasant sound. When tens of thousands are played together at a soccer game the effect is as obnoxious as if huge swarms of bees were buzzing next to your ears.

In other words, too much of a good thing can turn music into noise. More can be less. Now, remember that when it comes to your store, your services, your products and your customers. Too often, in our zeal to be special and please, we do everything possible. Every product is special and every service is stunning. But the effect can be like the vuvuzela. Too much can simply be too much.

It's so easy to see this in a store. So many today emphasize virtually everything, which can pack far less impact than retailers thinking critically about the handful of areas that really create differentiation. It's hard to imagine a retailer who wouldn't be better served to think about the products, services or attributes that would get a customer to pass another store. Remember, you can better play up those things that are special by turning down the noise elsewhere.

We all know how nice it is to have one associate tell us to have a great day or offer to help. The effect falls apart when 10 people in a row ask me the same question. It ceases to be special and becomes somewhat annoying. Likewise, price specials can always pack a punch. But too often we see aisles featuring miles of price "special"

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tags that suddenly look anything but special. Emphasis is what stands out; overkill defeats everything.

My son, a student of classical music, is constantly educating me on how to be a more educated listener. (It's a long, uphill struggle, but I'm trying.) One point he always talks about is the intensity of music. Many times what we think is loud is actually just intense. That is, the note is set up by a quiet period to build drama, attention and emphasis. If all the music received the same power, we'd miss the key phrases because there would be no key phrases.

It's easy to see the parallel in business - points of distinction get buried unless there is some quiet around them. And the vuvuzela helps provide that lesson. None of us who watched those games had any appreciation for the noise. I have a gut feeling that many people watched the games as I did, with the sound turned way down to eliminate the buzzing. Of course, since I don't know soccer all that well, it also meant I couldn't hear any commentary, which might have helped my enjoyment. (And I can't imagine how players coped with all that noise game after game.)

The bottom line is that without quiet, music becomes noise. Without quiet, the points that are special disappear. In short, less is more. But skip the cliché and simply repeat the following: remember the vuvuzela!

Michael Sansolo can be reached via email at msansolo@morningnewsbeat.com. His new book, "THE BIG PICTURE: Essential Business Lessons From The Movies," co-authored with Kevin Coupe, is available [by clicking here](#).

Tea Retailer Hopes To Bag New Sales, Markets

Crain's Chicago Business reports on the moves being made by Chicago-based Argo Tea to move beyond its Windy City roots. The company, backed by some heavy hitter investment money, plans to open its fourth New York City store today, and founder Arsen Avakian has some aggressive ambitions: He says he wants to make Argo the Apple to Starbucks' Microsoft.

"I want to build the Apple of tea, and really create a premier global brand," Avakian tells *Crain's*. "We have really reached a growth tipping point for us and are ready to take growth to the next level."

The challenge is not a small one. As *Crain's* notes, "The U.S. tea market grew 3% last year to \$7.3 billion, according to the Tea Assn. of the USA Inc. in New York. That's a fraction of the \$40-billion coffee market." And Argo remains a small player - it has just 18 stores, generating about \$10 million in annual sales.

Casey's Rejects Latest Couche-Tard Offer, Launches Defensive Buyback Plan

The *Wall Street Journal* this morning reports that convenience store chain Casey's General Stores has rejected the sweetened bid for the company by Canada's Alimentation Couche-Tard of \$1.9 billion, and has launched its own recapitalization bid to buy back as much as \$500 million worth of stock at a per-share price higher than that offered by its suitor.

Couche-Tard's offer is about \$36.75 per share, while Casey's offer is between \$38 and \$40.

According to Casey's president/CEO Robert Myers, the move was initiated because the board thinks that "our stock is meaningfully undervalued at recent trading levels and that the company is under-leveraged given Casey's strong balance sheet and consistent cash flow."

In a press release, Alain Bouchard, the Couche-Tard president/CEO, said he was disappointed with Casey's rejection of the bid. "We will continue to evaluate our options," Bouchard said.

As noted by the *Wall Street Journal*, Couche-Tard, which is the largest Canadian convenience store owner, wants to expand its U.S. presence with the acquisition. It has more than 5,800 stores, including a presence in 43 U.S. states, with its Couche-Tard, Mac's and Circle K brands. Casey's has about 1,500 stores located in the Midwest, mainly in small communities."

Wegmans Highlighting Food-Health Connections

Drug Store News reports that Wegmans is emphasizing the connection between food and health by putting "eat well, live well" stations near the pharmacies in its stores,

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where pharmacists can interact with shoppers on the connections that exist among food, medicine and lifestyle choices.

"There's so much good science showing that people lower their risk of many health problems when they make healthy food choices and include regular exercise in their routines," says Brian Pompo, coordinator of wellness and clinical services for pharmacy at Wegmans. "As health professionals, pharmacists know that food and medication play different but mutually supportive roles in helping customers lead healthier lives. We do give customers the counsel they need and want regarding medications, but we also believe that sharing how food supports health helps customers."

Wegmans says that it regularly updates its pharmacists in informational sessions designed to give them the ammunition necessary to answer shopper questions.

FastNewsBeat

- The *Richmond Times Dispatch* reports that Kroger "is expanding its fuel program to allow customers to redeem points at 26 Richmond area Shell stations beginning Monday. This would be in addition to redeeming points at fuel centers located at Kroger stores. Points are earned when shoppers use their Kroger loyalty card at check out. For every 100 points a customer racks up, they get 10 cents off per gallon of gas. They can redeem a maximum of 1,000 points at once, which translates into \$1 discount at the pump at a Kroger fuel center."

- Walgreen has begun promoting its flu shot offerings by selling flu shot gift cards for \$29.99 - a program that worked well last year. However, this year the company appears to be working to get a jump on the competition; in 2009, it did not begin promoting flu shots until early September.

At the same time, CVS/pharmacy and MinuteClinic have launched an informational campaign in its retail stores and clinics, as well as online at CVS.com and minuteclinic.com, to start educating consumers about what they need to know to protect themselves and their families during this upcoming flu season.

- CVS Caremark announced the release of the Caremark.com iPhone application. Available at no cost at the iPhone App Store, this new application provides iPhone users with the ability to access the Drug Information Database to learn more about various prescription drugs and allows CVS Caremark plan members to log-in and securely manage their prescriptions on-line. The application can be used with all versions of the Apple iPhone, the iPod Touch and the iPad.

- The *Oakland Tribune* reports that "while the rest of the retail industry hunkers down and waits in vain for AWOL shoppers to return, Bay Area grocery chains are battling it out in a full-fledged price war that shows no sign of ending." The newest competitor to add heat to the marketplace is Kroger, which announced that it will "open two 72,000-square-foot stores under the retailer's Foods Co. banner."

The goal, the story says, is to "fill the void left by Lucky's and Albertson's that closed several years ago despite efforts to keep them."

- Tyler, Texas-based Brookshire's said that it is relaunching a frequent shopper promotion with a "Thanks A Million Collect & Win Game" beginning August 4 in 119 supermarkets in Texas, Louisiana and Arkansas.

According to the company, "The game is a 15-week promotion in which customers receive a game piece with each transaction using their Thank You Card. Customers have two chances to win one million dollars. Customers place game markers on an official game board, and when they collect all the qualifying markers, they submit the game board to verify the prize. Customers can earn 'bonus' game pieces when they purchase selected products throughout the store with their Thank You Card. There is no limit on the number of bonus pieces customers can receive in a single transaction."

- Chase announced today it will open new full-service bank branches in 22 Albertsons stores in Southern and Central California this year. The first branches are now open in Kern, San Diego, Riverside, Orange and Los Angeles Counties as Chase expands to more than 800 branches in the state by year-end. Chase serves customers through 330 supermarket branches in Arizona, Colorado, Louisiana, Idaho, Illinois, Oregon, Texas and Washington.

- Ahold-owned Stop & Shop announced that it has completed the installation of solar panels on eight of its stores in Mass., Conn. and N.J. The solar panels will reduce the amount of energy consumed by these stores by more than seven percent. The completion of this project marks an extension of the company's commitment to reduce

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its carbon footprint by 20 percent by 2015 using 2008 as a baseline.

The MNB Wal-Mart Watch

- The *Chicago Tribune* reports that the Chicago City Council voted 45-4 to allow Walmart to build its third store in the city, in the South Side neighborhood of Chatham. There has been some speculation that some aldermen might try to delay the vote so they could pressure Walmart on a number of fronts, but the issue "sailed through the council relatively easily."

Executive Suite

- Walgreen-owned Duane Reade has promoted its executive vice president and chief merchandising officer, Joe Magnacca, to be its new president.
- Target Corp. has named Matt Zabel as vice president of government affairs. Zabel had been chief of staff for U.S. Senator John Thune since 2004. He replaces Nate Garvis, who retired from Target earlier this year.
- The Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA) announced the hiring of Leon Bruner, DVM, Ph.D., as GMA Senior Vice President for Scientific & Regulatory Affairs and Chief Science Officer.

Dr. Bruner is a twenty-three year veteran of the consumer products industry. He has served in a variety of positions at Procter & Gamble and The Gillette Company. Most recently, he served as Director, Environment, Health and Safety within Procter & Gamble's Gillette organization. He previously served as Vice President, Gillette Environment, Health and Safety from 2000 to 2007.