



SPECIAL RETAILER EDITION

Short-Term Opportunities for Retail Operators During a Down Economy

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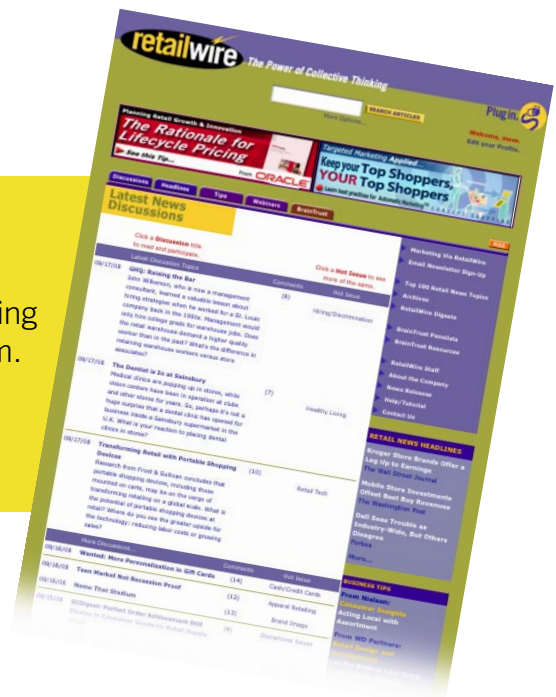
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Foreword

Advanced Strategies for a Down Economy?

(Maybe you're thinking too hard.)

By Rick Moss, President, RetailWire

There has been no shortage of advice for retailers lately on how to weather this recession. And fortunately, from what we've seen, much of it is quite sensible. Realizing that consumers are looking for value and stability at times like these, it makes sense for retailers to check fundamentals, like the quality of their customer service and the efficiency of their supply chain. Pricing and inventory, of course, are especially big concerns.

For example, in early August, we ran one of our daily discussions based on the recommendations of professors from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business who were addressing this very challenge. Gerard Cachon, a professor of operations and information management at the school, said the practice of carrying no more inventory than absolutely necessary to keep costs down and improve supply chain efficiency "was understandable when prices were either stable or declining but makes less sense when costs continue to rise." Marketing professor Stephen Hoch took on the problem of inflationary pricing by recommending that retailers emphasize categories where prices have not increased, as well as private label, which he said represents an "ace in the hole" for grocers.

In surveying all the lively discussions we've had on RetailWire.com in the last few months, we came to the conclusion that there were many other areas worthy of reexamination in light of current economic pressures. Retailers looking to continue to invigorate their businesses in the next year, when huge capital outlays and long-term plans are being relegated to the back burner, might benefit from some "low-hanging fruit" ideas, we thought.

The topic of our first discussion in this Digest, for example, takes a look at how grocers could perhaps polish up their take-home meals programs to fill an important current need - providing a close-if-not-exactly-restaurant-quality menu for consumers whose money is tight but with no more time to cook than they ever had.

We go on to some fairly "why, of course!" ideas for keeping senior shoppers happy; some recommendations for providing great multi-channel customer service; and a couple of very sensible ideas for turning your shoppers' charitable instincts into store loyalty.

We hope your company, or your retail customers (as the case may be), can benefit from these and other ideas that pop up daily on RetailWire.com. Please pass this Digest along and encourage your colleagues to join us online at: www.retailwire.com

Short-Term Opportunities at Retail

New Supervalu Line Looks to Keep Consumers Eating at Home

By George Anderson, Editor-in-Chief, Associate Publisher, RetailWire

The high price of gas and fewer dollars in their pockets have consumers eating at home more often while eating out at restaurants less frequently. Now, Supervalu is looking to give consumers 150 new reasons to eat at home more often with a line of restaurant-quality foods under the Culinary Circle brand.

The line will include products from across the store, with bakery, center store, deli and frozen selections. Items include everything from on-the-go meals to artisan breads and high-end desserts. Products within the line will be priced at 20 to 25 percent below comparable foods found in fast casual restaurants.

“Our line-up of chef-inspired Culinary Circle products is designed to bring affordable, quality meals to the dining room, and help meet the needs of consumers who love to eat out and sample different kinds of foods or indulge in the kinds of meals they simply don’t have the time to make at home,” said Chad Terrell, Culinary Circle brand manager, in a press release.

Discussion Questions: Is it a good time to reinvigorate meal solutions programs in supermarkets? Are supermarkets capable of delivering restaurant-quality meals? Are there grocers that represent the “best in class” in this regard?

COMMENTS FROM THE RETAILWIRE BRAINTRUST PANEL:

The timing is right for a well executed meal program. The combination of high energy prices (recent phenomena) and time-starved consumers (long standing trend) provides an opportunity to capture the “away from home” share of stomach. HMR failed because the strategy was flawed and the quality and variety were inconsistent and improperly priced.

The key to this new window is to deliver restaurant quality or even better home cooked meals to a very demanding audience. However, in addition to meal preparation, issues like convenience of pick-up (e.g., drive through windows, special parking and check out lines, bundled meals, meal of the week end-caps, etc.) and cleanup need to be addressed. The latter is something that may seem foreign to most male consumers, namely that there is something after the meal called “cleanup.” Packaging innovation is an opportunity to guarantee hot meals and easy cleanup.

– **Richard George, Professor of Food Marketing, Saint Joseph’s University**

The restaurants in the “fast casual” niche seem to be suffering the most from their target customers’ reduced discretionary spending. You can see it in these chains’ increasing emphasis on “deals” in their national TV campaigns (Applebees comes to mind). But the explosion of these mid-tier restaurants over the years has as much to do with dual-income families’ need for convenience as for the quality of the food they offer.

Bottom line: Supervalu does have an opportunity to step into this market, but it needs to execute well. If its venture into ready-to-eat meals doesn’t provide convenient solutions as well as value, the premise isn’t going to work.

– **Richard Seesel, Principal, Retailing In Focus LLC**

Any facility with a kitchen can produce restaurant quality meals. The key is in doing all the other things on par with restaurants. Sounds like Supervalu has addressed most of them, including a celebrity chef. Now it comes down to execution. One example of a gold standard here, in my opinion, is AJ's in the Phoenix area. Top notch.

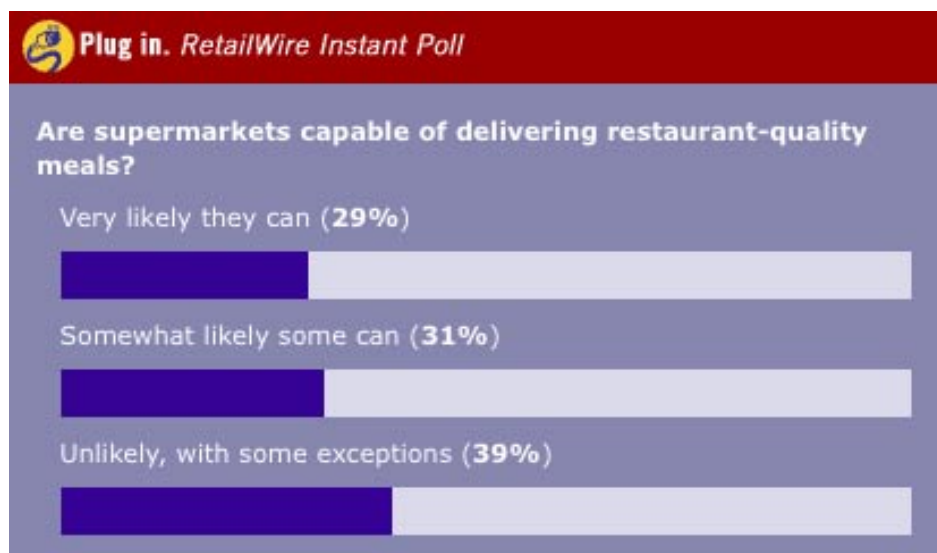
One thing that stores cannot emulate from restaurants is atmosphere--the experience of dining. I think the industry did itself a huge disservice by coining the "meal solutions" phrase. That's insider jargon and it implies there's a problem somewhere. I still hear consumers calling any prepared meal that they bring home (office, etc) "take-out." That's what it is for them. It's an active phrase that communicates the desired behavior, for crying out loud. It's time to put "meal solutions" thinking behind us.

– **Dan Raftery, President, Raftery Resource Network**

From a long-term perspective, traditional supermarkets face considerable competitive pressure from Walmart Supercenters that can offer lower prices due to their economies of scale and efficient distribution systems. It is very difficult for traditional supermarkets to compete on price. Supermarket chains need to differentiate their offering and compete with Supercenters by offering unique products and services and superior customer service. Supervalu's Culinary Circle offering reflects this trend among supermarket chains to compete on quality and service. Wegmans and HEB are examples of regional supermarket chains that have been very effective in pursuing this strategic direction.

The quality of restaurant food ranges from quick service to haute cuisine restaurants. Based on the meal solutions offerings by Wegmans and HEB, Supervalu's offering should be at least equivalent to the offering of casual dining restaurant chains. The price of these meal solutions from Supervalu is less than eating a meal at a casual dining restaurant, however, consumers have to do some preparation of the food and clean the dishes afterward. In these difficult economic times, meal solutions offered by Supervalu should be an attractive solution compared to dining out for some consumers, but not as attractive to the very price conscious consumers who will and can spend the time preparing meals from basic ingredients. Reinvigorating a meal solution program at this time might be very effective for introducing consumers who dine out frequently to a lower cost alternative.

– **Barton A. Weitz, Professor, Exec. Dir. - Miller Center for Retailing Education and Research, University of Florida**



Short-Term Opportunities at Retail

New Store Considered for Senior Shoppers

By Bernice Hurst, Managing Partner, Fine Food Network

Following an experiment by German supermarket Kaiser that seems to be far more successful than anticipated, British chain, Tesco, is considering a store designed specifically to meet the needs of older shoppers. Music, non-slip floors, extra-wide aisles, brighter than usual lights and steps to assist in reaching high shelves are just some of the German store's features.

To see if the concept would translate to the British market, a group of over-65s from Newcastle, where Tesco is considering opening a first pensioner-friendly store, toured the first one to open in Germany. The fact-finding mission was led by Professor Jim Edwardson, 67, founder of Newcastle University's Institute for Ageing and Health. *The Daily Mail* quoted Professor Edwardson as saying, "Almost everything about supermarket shopping in the U.K. is wrong for elderly customers, from shelving that is too high to reach or too low to get to... The Kaiser store was the first of its kind in Germany and is so impressive. The trolleys on their own are lighter and easier to move."

He also admired clear signage and magnifying glasses on shelves and trolleys.

Since the Kaiser store opened in 2005, sales have increased by 25 percent above forecast figures, with more than 60 percent of its customers aged over 50, according to the report.

Recognition of the growing number of older people in the U.K. is making retailers consider ways to accommodate them. The charity, Help the Aged, claims that addressing their needs will cost little but will lead to large rewards. It is predicted that in just 20 years' time, half the population of Europe will be aged over 50. Recent figures from the Office for National Statistics showed that the UK already has more pensioners than children under 16.

Discussion Question: What do you think is the market potential for senior-friendly stores? What are the pros and cons for U.S. chains opening such concepts? Are they really useful for older shoppers, way too patronizing, or just another bid for publicity?

COMMENTS FROM THE RETAILWIRE BRAINTRUST PANEL:

I do all the shopping in my household and if I occasionally shop on a different day, like Thursday morning, I am struck by the different demographics of the shoppers...they are elderly.

Then I began to think how poorly the store was organized for that population and the poor level of service relative to what such a population might require. Stuff on high shelves, shelf tags with prices that are hard to read and harder to decipher, etc. Little help with bagging and getting groceries back into the car (or cab, as some cannot drive). Glad to see someone has shared the epiphany and is doing something about it.

– **Joel Rubinson, Chief Research Officer, The Advertising Research Foundation (ARF)**

Having recently been to Meijer with my vision impaired 79 year old dad, I was dumbfounded at the issues he encounters every week just trying to pick up essentials for his assisted living room. He is the most "sighted" of 8-10 cronies in a wing that specializes in sight loss, so he shops for many. Hooray for Tesco on this one and I hope a major retailer in the USA quickly follows suit.

– **Anne Howe, Sr. Vice President - Market Intelligence, MARS Advertising**

Brilliant! This makes total sense. There are areas of the U.S. where the concentration of seniors demands that retailers market to that constituency. And, marketing includes the in-store experience. But, I couldn't help thinking while I was reading the commentary that each of these ideas to be implemented in "senior oriented" stores would be positive for all shoppers. Wider aisles? Better lighting? Reachable higher shelves? It is tough to argue with any of these improvements for any supermarket.

– **Gene Detroyer, Entrepreneur, Advisor, Consultant, Counselor, Independent**

As many have noted, the aging population is growing, due in part to health care and increased life expectancy in this century. So there is definitely a market for this kind of retail. According to the Pew Foundation, the percentage of elderly people (over 65) will increase to 19% of the population by 2050, or about 81 million people. That's up from 37 million elderly in 2005. For contrast's sake, in 1990, the elderly accounted for 19% of the population.

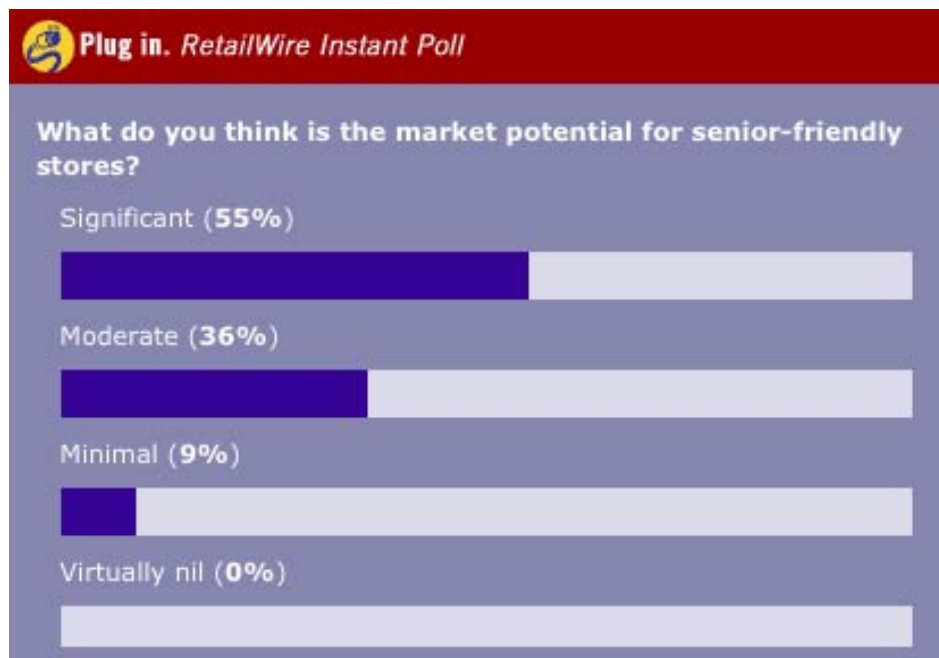
What's interesting to me is that the innovations and changes that result from accommodating the elderly in grocery, I believe, will infiltrate other forms of retail too. These innovations, which are more inherently people-friendly, may also find their way into mainstream retail and digital retail spaces.

– **Liz Crawford, President, Crawford Consulting**

Build them a lively store by the side of the road
Where the race of seniors will like to attend.
Plan it so they can easily reach the product needed
And their eyes can read price tags without pretend.

Don't make grandma and gramps feel like topped out dudes
That are tolerated while they still have spendable cash.
Appeal to the youngsters still lingering in their souls
Or else this experiment will wind up like leftover hash.

– **Gene Hoffman, President, Corporate Strategies International**



Short-Term Opportunities at Retail

Consumers Looking for a Seamless Shopping Experience

By George Anderson, Editor-in-Chief, Associate Publisher, RetailWire

When a customer is unhappy with an experience on a retailer's website or has a bad experience ordering from a catalog, she's unhappy with the retailer. The fact is that no matter how many different shopping venues consumers are given, when they are unhappy, that dissatisfaction extends to every part of the company.

A new report by Sterling Commerce concludes that consumers are looking for seamless shopping experiences and retailers are getting closer to giving them what they want.

"Shoppers see retailers as one brand - they don't think in terms of multiple channels," Jim Bengier, global retail industry executive for Sterling Commerce, said in a press release. "Shoppers don't care how difficult or challenging it is for retailers to organize their companies to meet their needs. This survey shows that retailers without cross-channel execution plans already in place will soon be left behind. But, there are opportunities to leapfrog the competition by automating cross-channel processes and achieving global order, shipment, and inventory visibility across all channels."

According to the research, 81 percent of retailers surveyed were either fully or partially integrated across all channels (catalog, kiosk, online and in stores) although many did not offer cross-channel services such as ordering a product online and picking it up at a store location.

Having cross-channel capabilities can help stores address out-of-stock issues and keep consumers from going to a competitor. Not having a product in stock in a store can be addressed if consumers are able to order at an in-store kiosk, over the phone or on a PC. Two-thirds of consumers surveyed by Sterling are looking to incorporate this ability by automating inventory across various businesses.

Two-thirds of the retailers surveyed indicated that they will be able to view inventory on-hand, in-transit, and available-to-promise through a single automated process within the next 12 months. Sixty percent are working on systems that will allow them to identify items in other stores that can address an out-of-stock on their own.

Discussion Questions: How critical is it that retailers integrate their various selling channels? What are the operational, technological and other steps that merchants must take to achieve the idealized seamless state of retailing?

COMMENTS FROM THE RETAILWIRE BRAINTRUST PANEL:

Consumer expectations usually are ahead of where retailers are at and retailers fight to catch up and possibly even exceed expectations. Discussing how critical it is to integrate selling channels probably shouldn't be the issue. Consumers already expect that. The issue is more about how fast can you meet or exceed consumer expectations. And it doesn't only apply to brick and mortar retailers. Virtual online stores very often find themselves out of stock and offer no alternative to the consumer.

Technology certainly plays a big role in the ability to manage inventory and merchants have to constantly stay on top of what product is moving and at what rate. Bottom line from a consumer's perspective; if you promote the product, it needs to be available somehow, somewhere. A tall order but consumers will be loyal to those who do it right.

– **Matthew Spahn, President & CEO, planitretail, LLC**

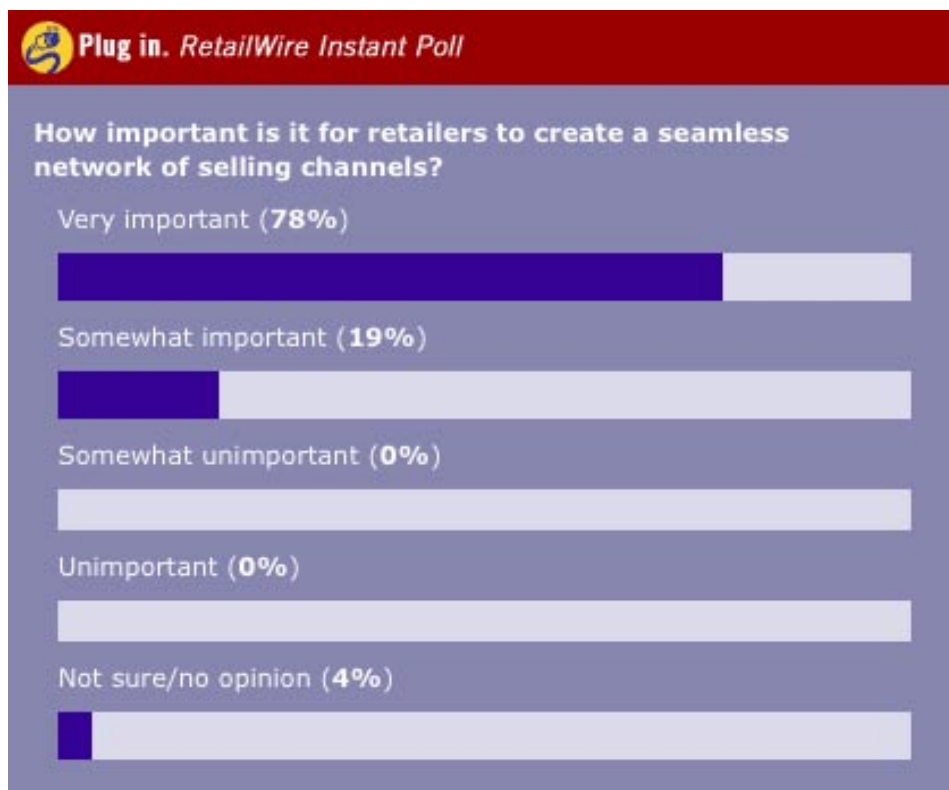
To the consumer, every point of contact with a retailer influences their perception. Poor customer service, mis-marked prices, out-of-stocks, or just a messy store can all contribute to a bad experience. Retailers need to recognize that every point of contact with the consumer is important and can lead to either positive or negative images.
– **Ray Jones, Managing Director, Dechert-Hampe & Co.**

Cross-channel shopping solutions are so innately logical to us now, that it seems almost unreasonable to put up with retail operations that continually have out of stocks when we all know that technology can and should be solving that problem.

I think our loyalty to retailers who can get these kinds of systems up and running sooner will continue to grow, so those who solve it first have a big advantage.
– **Anne Howe, Sr. Vice President - Market Intelligence, MARS Advertising**

Imagine the missed sales when inventory could not be checked across all channels. If stores are out of something, they should be able to access a database and say, “yes we have this in our catalog, other store, etc. I’ll order it for you!” Voila, a missed sale gone right!

Many companies spend a lot of money on the software and then don’t examine the processes across the channels. Why? Because usually they’re not fully integrated; different managers and associates, and no one person can cross over all channels. It’s a good opportunity for a non-political consultant to improve efficiencies across all channels and assure process and procedures match. Also, great opportunities for training across channels.
– **Susan Rider, President, Rider and Associates, LLC**



Short-Term Opportunities at Retail

Shoppers Determine Grocers' Charitable Giving

By George Anderson, Editor-in-Chief, Associate Publisher, RetailWire

Consumers who shop at Waitrose grocery stores in the U.K. and at Whole Foods in the U.S. have a direct hand in deciding where the chains spend their charitable dollars.

According to a piece on the *Springwise* website, shoppers at Waitrose are offered a token each time they shop at one of the company's stores. They then decide which of three local charities should get Waitrose's pounds by placing the token in a designated Perspex tube. At the end of each month, the chain counts the tokens in the tubes and gives a corresponding amount to the charities.

In the U.S., shoppers who bring their own bags to Whole Foods are given wooden nickels that they can deposit in boxes assigned to local charities. Whole Foods then donates a percentage of its community giving dollars based on the charities chosen by its shoppers.

Discussion Questions: What do you think of the process at Waitrose and Whole Foods where shoppers get to play a role in directing the chains' community giving?

COMMENTS FROM THE RETAILWIRE BRAINTRUST PANEL:

Shoppers getting to play a role in directing the chains' community giving is not really unique to the retail chains in the U.K. For example, in St. Louis a couple of the supermarket chains have allowed consumers to purchase valuable certificates from their own churches, temples, schools, and other charitable institutions to redeem at the check stand for groceries.

– **David Biernbaum, Senior Marketing and Business Development Consultant, David Biernbaum Associates**

This is a reasonable strategy to build closer customer relationships, though it is not new. Publix has been doing this for years, focused on schools in each community they serve.

There does seem to be a trend with more brands, not just retailers, smartly aligning their philanthropic activities with those of their customers. Some good examples are:

- Kimpton Hotels (Dress for Success, Red Ribbon, Trust for Public Land).
- SunTrust Bank here in Atlanta offers new customers a choice of \$50 debit card or a \$100 charitable donation to the charity of their choice.
- Georgia Natural Gas has just launched a program similar to Publix where they allow customers to target a percentage of their bill to specific schools.

– **Phil Rubin, CEO, rDialogue**

Letting the consumer stay in control helps ensure that the brand fan base gets what they want, and in turn is more likely to remain loyal.

Further, consumers are more in control than ever before, whether it's site-to-store shopping or bartering on social networks or customizing ringtones. Collecting their input is a part of doing business now.

– **Liz Crawford, President, Crawford Consulting**

Agreed, it is a good idea. In the case of Whole Foods, it promotes the “Buy Local” marketing push with the complementary “Support Local” movement.

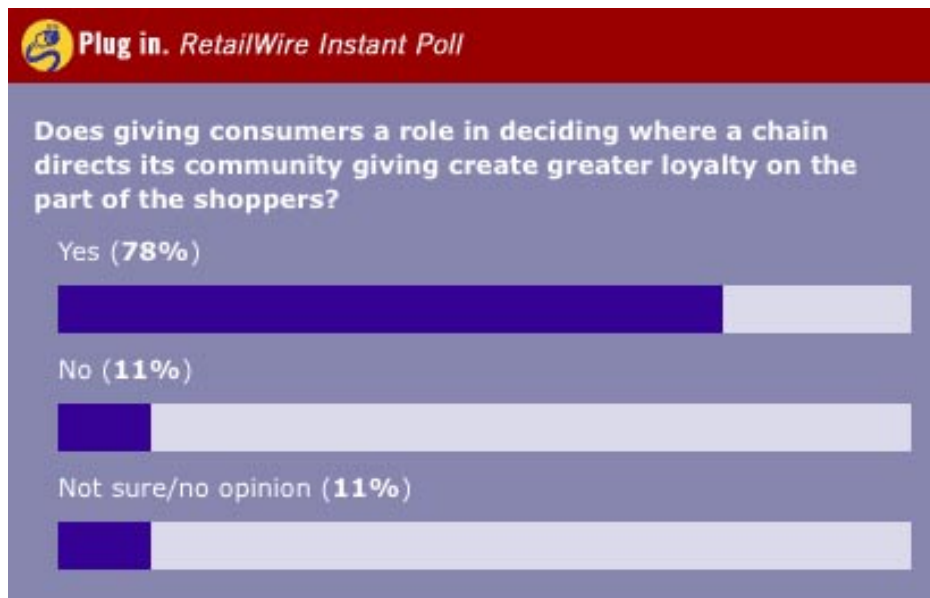
However, I cannot help thinking it's a Band-Aid for sufficiently researching the consumer's charitable preferences. Shouldn't you know what charities your consumers want to support? In addition, are these sorts of efforts (i.e., I will give \$1 for every wooden token) as effective as an organized and integrated philanthropic strategy that involves both business and community accountability?

– **Joanna Kennedy, Marketing Director, Tomax Corporation**

Annually, Kennebunk Savings Bank in Maine sends a ballot with its statements asking its customers to vote on which charities the bank should support. Several thousand customers vote each time.

When the bank or retailer asks its customers to vote, it's probably more impactful than having management make the decisions. Isn't it interesting how few retailers ask their customers?

– **Mark Lilien, Consultant, Retail Technology Group**



The RetailWire BrainTrust Panel

We thank our BrainTrust panelists who have graciously volunteered to lend their estimable viewpoints to our news discussions. They also, from time to time, advise us on our programs and policies.

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Brian Anderson, President, BA Search Group

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