

CENTERSTORE

SAMPLE

Albertsons Stores Enter the Ice Age

By CAROL ANGRISANI

BOISE, Idaho — Albertsons is one of the first retailers to use a new technology that gives advertisers good reason to warm up to the frozen department.

The retailer's Dallas/Fort Worth operating area concluded a three-month advertising program in which an invisible coating was affixed to the inside of 150 freezer doors at 75 stores. Each time a freezer door was opened, the coating produced ads for Pictsweet-brand frozen vegetables. The image remained visible for about two minutes after the door was closed.

The designs are transparent, appearing almost like an ice carving, so that the view to the inside is not obscured.

"The concept is very unique," Carol Roberts, assistant grocery sales manager for Albertsons' Dallas/Fort Worth, told *SN*. "We've had a lot of good customer response." Roberts couldn't elaborate.

Roberts especially liked the fact that the ads were on the door, as opposed to the shelf, yet didn't block the view of the food inside.

"It didn't cover up any product," she said.

Kings Super Markets, Parsippany, N.J., is also using the Visual Ice technology. Ads for the CBS television show "Moonlight" appear each time the freezer door is opened.

"The technology is cutting-edge," said Kings' category manager Hans Ketels. "It really catches our eye." See *Albertsons*, **Page 38**



CLEAN GREEN

The greening of household cleaners continues to grow as mainstream stores and manufacturers add new products to the mix

By LYNNE MILLER

Green household products are making a clean sweep through supermarkets.

Eco-friendly cleaning products from small, niche companies are gaining widespread distribution in mainstream stores, while major national brands are reformulating products to reach green consumers.

"We've been increasing shelf space for these items," said Kevin O'Brien, category manager for Roche Bros., an independent chain near Boston. "There's very strong demand for them."

Roche Bros. stores carry full lines of kitchen, bathroom and laundry products from Sun & Earth, Seventh Generation, Ecover, Mrs. Meyer's and Dragonfly Organics. Stores typically offer at least two dozen items displayed on shelves stretching four to eight feet. Green cleaners are grouped together and are heralded by tags that clearly identify the products as eco-friendly, O'Brien said. Roche is rolling out nearly 50 products in the

category, including all-purpose cleaners, candles and a fragrance system from Method, a company that's known for its environmentally sound products packaged in sleek containers.

"With this scare in China, people are getting to be more and more careful about what they're purchasing," O'Brien said. "They're looking toward products with less chemicals."

Green cleaners rely on plant-based substances to fight dirt. For example, Mrs. Meyer's Clean Day Dish Soap contains soap bark extract, considered to be "one of nature's best de-greasers," according to the company.

Earth-friendly all-purpose cleaners generate the strongest demand, O'Brien said. Among laundry detergents, Seventh Generation products are delivering double-digit sales increases, as are "free" products — those made without dyes and perfumes, he said.

Albertsons Stores Enter the Ice Age

Continued From Page 36 customers' attention."

The single-store test, which began in August and was scheduled to end last month, took place in Kings' Fort Lee, N.J., store.

Depending on test results, the retailer may expand it to some of its other 26 units.

Technology like this is needed in the frozen department because the low temperatures and condensation make it difficult for most ads to stay in place, said Ketels.



Visual Ice images appear when a freezer case door is opened and remain visible for about two minutes.

"Frozen has always been a challenge," he noted.

That's one of the main

reasons why Ron Johnson, Visual Ice Marketing's president and chief execu-

tive officer, got involved with the company, which began providing the tech-

nology this past March. Johnson has a long history in food retailing, heading such companies as Kash n' Karry, Jitney Jungle and, most recently, Minyard. He left the retail side of the business 18 months ago.

Throughout his years in grocery, Johnson found that frozen was always the most difficult area in which to convey an in-store message.

"For years, I always thought of how we could advertise in frozen without blocking products or having signs curl up or fall into the vents," he said.

Visual Ice Marketing uses patented nanotech-

Clean Green

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and may increase the line, said Pam Korzun, the store's manager for health and beauty aids and nonfoods.

"Method cleaning products have been flying off

the shelves," she said. "People are coming in and thanking me for [sourcing] an environmentally friendly cleaning product."

Household cleaners made from natural ingredi-

ents delivered double- and sometimes triple-digit sales increases in supermarkets during the 52 weeks ending Sept. 9, 2007, according to data for several leading specialty brands tracked by Information Resources Inc., Chicago.

"There's no doubt they're showing great growth," said Brian Sansoni, spokesman for the Soap and Detergent Association, a Washington-based trade group. "Their piece of the market has been small, and there's room to grow."

OVERCOMING AN OLD IMAGE

Green cleaners have come a long way in a relatively short time. Consumers didn't embrace natural products when they first hit the market around 20 years ago. The first wave of cleaners didn't live up to expectations for cleaning performance, said John Mullins, president and chief executive officer of Sun & Earth, which makes nontoxic, pleasantly scented cleaners using coconut and orange oils and other natural ingredients.

"It created a stigma with consumers that the products were inferior and overpriced," said Mullins. In fact, he said, there still are shoppers who believe harsh chemicals are necessary for proper cleaning.

In the years since, however, manufacturers have invested in research to im-

prove their products. They developed oleo-based cleaners that performed as well as synthetic solvents or petroleum-based counterparts, Mullins said. Based in King of Prussia, Pa., Sun & Earth bills its products as safe, natural

he noted. "There will be room for a niche product like ours. We have loyal consumers."

Likewise, the founder of Mrs. Meyer's said the arrival of more products from mainstream manufacturers could boost awareness of natural cleaners.

"It's a really exciting time for growth," said Monica Nassif, founder and president of the brand that was named after her mother, Thelma Meyer, who became a cleaning expert while raising nine children. "We offer a point of difference from the large mass players."

Oakland, Calif.-based Clorox plans to introduce a line of plant-based cleaning products, called Green Works, sometime in 2008. The company this year tested the cleaners at selected stores in the San Francisco Bay Area. The products, with suggested retail prices ranging from \$2.99 to \$3.39, will be about 20% more expensive than conventional Clorox cleaners.

Clorox is targeting consumers who want affordable and effective green cleaners.

"The retailer response as we talk about this product has been very encouraging," said Aileen Zerrudo, spokeswoman for Clorox. "It definitely is an opportunity to grow the natural cleaning category if you're making something more accessible."



Seventh Generation's products are selling well at Roche Bros.

and affordable. A 22-ounce bottle of all-purpose spray cleaner retails for \$3.79.

With products from major players like Clorox now hitting the market, competition among manufacturers for shelf space is bound to heat up. Yet the interest in green products from big companies could help the niche players, too, Mullins said.

"It's an exciting change,"



Ecologically sound cleaners are delivering double- and triple-digit sales growth.

nology to create a thin, temperature-sensitive coating for refrigerator or freezer doors. The coating is applied in the form of a promotional design or logo, which is "invisible" until a customer opens the door and the temperature changes. Then, it turns to an "ice" image.

The images are relatively easy to put in place.

"The installation process is simple after a brief training session," said Johnson. "[Visual Ice] can do it, or the retailer can do it, simply by following instructions."

The time is right for Visual Ice due to the nature of the frozen department, Johnson said. That's because years ago, frozen food was merchandised mostly in open cases and easily stood out. But as the industry focused on energy conservation and moved to doors instead of open cases, product presentation suffered, he said.

Visual Ice has been used or tested by about 100 retailers, including Food Emporium, Ralphs and Wal-Mart, which is running a single-store test with General Mills in the frozen pizza category.

Retailers do not share in the revenue derived from these ads.

Johnson said Visual Ice is valuable because it draws much-needed attention to frozen doors, while creating in-store excitement.

Pictsweet Co., Bells, Tenn., has used static clings, but always wanted an ad that wouldn't obscure



Kings Super Markets tested Visual Ice for two months.

product merchandised behind frozen doors.

That's why it tested Visual Ice ads in Albertsons.

The ads promoted the company's new "Steamers," frozen vegetables that can be steamed in the bag.

Pictsweet is now considering using the ad vehicle in other markets, according to Mark Jones, regional sales manager. "The technology provides high visibility of our ads," he said.

Jones' only concern with Visual Ice is that the ads only appear when the door is opened. Visual Ice is addressing that by exploring a new mechanism that would blow out hot air on a timed basis, thereby producing the ads more frequently.

News Watch

SAM'S CLUB PREPARES FOR 'TASTE OF SAM'S' EVENTS

BENTONVILLE, Ark. — More than 550 Sam's Club locations are gearing up for the wholesale club's annual "Taste of Sam's." During the three-day event, 15,000 Sam's Club demo associates will provide about 9 million members and guests with samples of more than 50 holiday foods. Items ranging from creme brulee cheesecake to jumbo cooked shrimp and creme brie bistro-stuffed chicken breasts will be sampled from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday, Nov. 16, through Sunday, Nov. 18, nationwide. Sam's Club chef associates will also take the stage to show shoppers how to create holiday meals. Recipe cards featuring sampled items will be available. Store associates spend two weeks, and more than 264,000 hours, preparing for Taste of Sam's events, according to the retailer. In 2006, Sam's Club provided approximately 2 million samples in all, representing about 500,000 pounds of food.

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"The technology is cutting-edge. It really catches our customers' attention."

Hans Ketels
category manager,
Kings Super Markets