

HOT SPOT

By Art Snyder

Forget the business news headlines of recent months. The *real* news is that beverage, candy and snack manufacturers have rededicated themselves to innovation, improvement and opportunity. Just consider the report below on the **2009 All Candy Expo**, for example, to see your fantastic options in your foodservice and vending profit centers. Or think about the potential with **Pepsi's AMP Energy** and **Coca-Cola's** plans for today's Hispanic consumer. Details on all of these, and more, are below.

2009 All Candy Expo report

Billed as the largest confectionary, cookie and snack trade show in the Western Hemisphere, the National Confectioner Association (NCA) **All Candy Expo** for 2009 was held recently in Chicago, and the three-day event can serve as your guide to the top trends, snacks, candies and other sweets and confections for the year ahead. Overall, the convention buzz suggests that consumers are responding to the stressed economy by indulging themselves with taste-satisfying sweets and snacks. The smart rink operator, therefore, will be sure to keep the snack bar, foodservice court and vending areas bursting with a strong array of customer favorites. And, to tweak the excitement factor and boost those sales and profits ever higher, rink operators will keep the mix fresh with consistent introductions of new fare.

A few particulars from this year's **All Candy Expo** that saw the introduction of hundreds of new snacks and candies:

- Jalapeno** accents seemed to show up in almost every category — from chips and candies to ready-to-eat meat treats.

- Milk chocolate** is beginning to surge in demand, with **dark chocolates** weakening a bit. Still, **chocolate** seems to be unable to do anything wrong, especially priced for good value.

- Pomegranate, blueberry cranberry** and **açai** (a purple fruit of the palm tree), along with familiar **cherry** and **raspberry**, are making their move toward broad, general availability in a host of new products and updated varieties of traditional favorites.

- Lemon** flavors and **lemonade** look more mainstream than ever. This growth seems to be a reflection of up-ramped demand from the Hispanic consumer, who traditionally seeks fruit flavors.

- 100-calorie** snack packaging offers convenience and portion control, and manufacturers will be bringing more and more of their cookies, salty snacks

and sweet-and-salty snacks packaged in **100-calorie** bags, for both vending and counter sales. (This size works well with your birthday programs, too.)

- Nostalgia** is back, and manufacturers are reverting to the “psychological comfort” of old-time graphics and packaging. Further, they’re reviving yesteryear’s favorite candies and snacks and devising minor flavor varieties of this fare.

- Sour candy** looks as strong as ever with teen and younger consumers, and adults, likewise, are getting into the fun of sour candies.

- Salt-topped candy and sweet snacks** look to become more popular than ever, so stock such fare in several of your rink profit centers. A variation of this category features **sea salt**, although that’s more of a marketing prospect for manufacturers.

- Holiday variations** — in fes-

tive colors and shapes — of top-selling candies will get their introductions and marketing push in the months ahead. Stay alert for Halloween and Christmas stagings, especially. They have *mega*-potential for pacesetting profits in the last quarter of the year.

- Mint** appears to be an “in” flavor going into 2010, so look for mint accents with both familiar and new candies and confections. Zesty fruit- and mint-flavored candies are sure to see a lot of development and rink potential.

- Genuine fruit additions** to snacks and candies are gaining favor, so look to stock and feature these items in the months ahead.

Just Born goes retro

Longtime candy manufacturer **Just Born** is moving forward by looking backward. The company’s three largest brands — **Hot Tamales**, **Peanut Chews** and **Mike And Ike** — are now avail-



Candy Expo forecast, AMP Energy, Coke Hispanic initiative

able in their classic packaging designs of many years ago. **Mike And Ike** and **Hot Tamales** products are offered for counter sales in 6-ounce boxes, and **Peanut Chews** will see the light of day via a king-size bar. The nostalgia-based packaging is designed to “tap into the products’ history and the consumers’ emotional attachment to them,” according to the company (*and in tune with what the results of the 2009 All Candy Expo, above, suggest*). A retro-candy session or two sounds like a delightfully tasty good time, so make it happen at your rink this summer.

Fisher Nuts’ single-serve lineup

Consumers today are counting on at least some health benefits with many of their snacks, and that’s good news for you when you feature

single-serve bagged peanuts, almonds, cashews and other nuts from **Fisher Nuts**. The company has introduced an array of flavored-nut varieties, too, such as **Roasted & Salted Peanuts**, **Honey Roasted Peanuts**, **Cajun Salsa Peanuts**, **Dry Roast Pistachios**, **Roasted & Salted Almonds** and **Energy Blend**, featuring cashews, almonds and cranberries. Packaging ranges from 1.5-ounce to 2.5-ounce bags. Check with your supplier on the new single-serve fare from **Fisher Nuts**. For more, visit fishernuts.com. (*Besides the Fisher brand, the company manufactures nut products for more than 70 other companies’ branded product lines.*)

Sour Now and Later Soft

Now and Later Soft has gone sour — that’s a *good* thing (*as predicted by the All Candy Expo, above*) — with its latest reinvention on the mouth-watering horizon: the **Sour Now and Later Soft** bar. The new taffy is, indeed, sour, to tickle the palettes of youngsters everywhere. Formatted in six-piece bars, **Sour Now and Later Soft** has three flavors: **Sour Orange**, **Sour Raspberry** and **Sour Strawberry**. The 2.75-ounce bars are substantial, and your skaters will see the confection as an especially good value. Talk to your candy supplier for extra “sour signage” with this treat.

Accent on Hollywood

- Miley Cyrus** means monster teen power, with her **Hannah Montana: The Movie** being a record-setting live-action Disney release this year. Look for any licensed products for use in your redemption area, as well as with birthday parties and many school sessions. The soundtrack should serve your rink well, also.

- Monsters vs. Aliens**, from DreamWorks Animation, and **Fast & Furious** epitomize the commercial power of teens and pre-teens. Licensed



items, including themed candy bars and bagged candy, are sure to be a big hit at the rink.

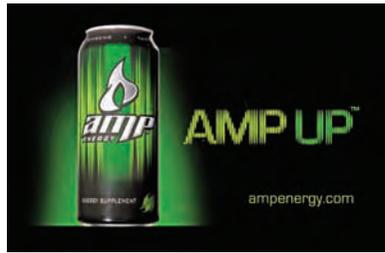
- Warner Bros.** promotions will bank on the phenomenal **Harry Potter** franchise and this summer’s **Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince**, with the **Where the Wild Things Are** movie making its debut in October. Other **Warner Bros.** marketing will key on consumer film and video favorites under the DC Comics banner: **Batman**, **Superman**, **Supergirl** and **The Justice League**. Other properties in the spotlight are **Looney Tunes**, **Scooby-Doo** and

Tom and Jerry, among others.

•*Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* will see themed M&M's and Snickers Nougabot candies this summer, and to ensure high demand, massive marketing and advertising campaigns will get under way, to coincide with the movie's debut. Even Kyle Busch will pitch in, with his NASCAR® race car going with a special paint theme to popularize the film and M&M's candy.

AMP Energy

Pepsi's AMP Energy brand is set for a major marketing and sampling campaign this summer, so see what your Pepsi supplier can do for your rink with AMP Energy discounts, promotions and signage. AMP Energy saw its debut in 2001 and now is available in several flavors. Overall, the energy drink beverage



segment generated \$6.5 billion in sales in 2008, according to *Beverage Digest*, and is on a vigorous growth curve. AMP Energy's share of the market was up almost 70 percent in 2008, to get to the No. 4 sales spot. Pepsi has "really gotten behind the brand ... promoting it aggressively and marketing it well," according to John Sicher, the editor and publisher of *Beverage Digest*. Energy category leaders are Monster and Red Bull, followed by Rockstar and AMP Energy. Be sure your rink offers at least one or

two of the top energy brands.

New Coca-Cola Hispanic programs

"Destapa Tus Sueños," or "Unleash Your Dreams," is the theme for the new Hispanic marketing campaign from Coca-Cola, and the company has supporting TV commercials airing nationally on Univision, Telemundo and TeleFutura, the three largest Spanish-language networks. In-store marketing complements the outreach, and all of this effort is part of Coca-Cola's commitment to reach this largest minority group in the United States with a gesture of support for an emerging community. The bottom line for the beverage giant is to revitalize its sparkling beverage offerings. ("Sparkling beverage" is the company's preferred term for carbonated

beverage.) Further, Coca-Cola is reaching out to the Hispanic consumer with support for soccer, as with a partnering with the Mexican National Team, and authentic Hispanic food brands, among more than 100 other programs and organizations getting attention from Coca-Cola. If your rink has a measurable Hispanic base — or would like to reach that perhaps overlooked demographic in your area — contact your Coca-Cola supplier and discuss how you, too, might help Coca-Cola with their Hispanic initiative. The company should have plenty of signage, volume discounts and other ways to support your rink as it makes a profit targeting the active Hispanic consumer.

Art Snyder is a regular RINKSIDER contributor who specializes in marketing and technology. He lives in Centerville, Ohio.

Calif. rink operator finds success in spite of economic downturn

By Dionne Obeso

Mike Jacques is the owner of Roller King in Roseville, Calif., and he knows how to keep a rink in the green! The economy is hard for everyone as jobs are lost, causing people to spend less money, in turn causing further layoffs. There are two ways to look at a roller skating rink in this kind of economic climate: as simply another unnecessary place to spend money, or as a relatively inexpensive and wholesome way to keep the whole family happy. The RINKSIDER spoke to Mike about how to keep a rink running profitably during the economic downturn.

Mike Jacques: First off, I am semi-retired. My son and daughter (30 and 32 years of age) take care of the day to day business. I bring this up because my first point would be that they are younger and have new, fresh and more up to date ideas on running our business. As one gets older it seems you get a little complacent and set in the ways you run your business. I tried to stay current and up to date, but some things I just wouldn't try or I got hung up on the traditional ways of doing things.

My basic philosophy has always been to continue updating and fixing our facility a little every year. This way you don't one day come in and realize that your place is a disaster and needs a makeover. Doing some major project every year allows you to keep your facility in good shape all the time, and doing it bit by bit keeps the expenses from getting out of control.

There are a lot of things that can be done: paint outside, paint inside, resurface the parking lot, new roof, new wood

floor, new carpet, new mural, new table tops or tables, new skates, etc. Doing them little by little helps keep your facility up to date without the need for an expensive renovation all at once (which usually means debt).

Business is not booming by any means, but it is good! We have slowly gone to five parties per week. During the winter, they are almost all booked up with schools, churches, company parties, and private birthday parties; it is the wave of the future as far as I'm concerned. Most rinks try to discount the weekly sessions and have small attendance at less money per head. I either have private parties or close and save the variable costs of being open for slow sessions. I can also afford to do this since my fixed costs are so low.

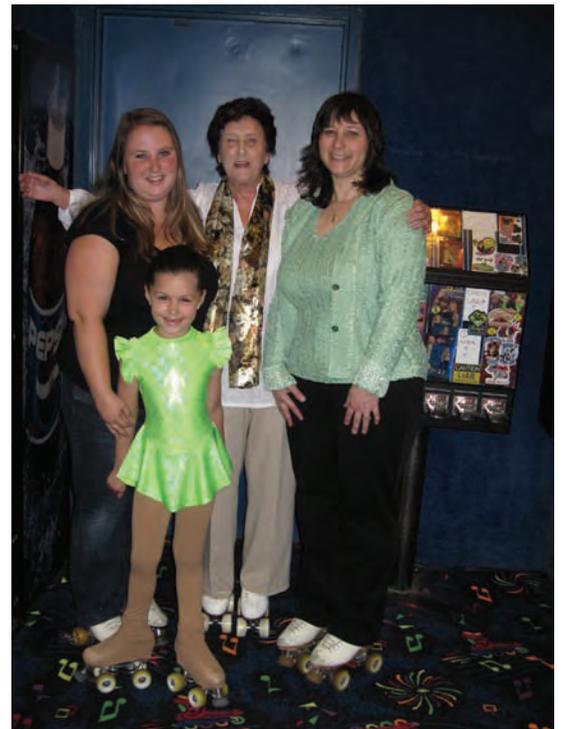
How do we keep fixed costs low? Well first off, we have everything in the building paid for, as well as our land and building. If you update your building every year with profits from the previous year, you stay out of debt. Also if you pay off your mortgage and keep from refinancing, you also stay out of debt. One other point that's important: I try and fix everything myself. The only thing I don't tackle is refrigeration. I'm no genius or real handy man, just logical and patient.

One of the best improvements we have made lately is to put in an ATM. I never thought it would be worth it, but I'd say we go through \$2000.00 a week. Also credit card swiping is a must. The newest craze is to do it through your internet connection, which improves the speed. We're also dumping most of our costly yellow page ads or downsizing in favor of internet advertising. This is tricky, because you don't always have to pay for search engine results. Learn

about search engines and web advertising, or hire someone in the know. You also absolutely need a web site. We get thousands of hits a month and we can track where they've come from and where they go on our site (www.rollerkingroseville.com). Check out the virtual tour, you can't miss it!

Friday night is Family Night at our rink, which, after it was switched from Thursdays, dramatically improved attendance. We also rent our rink to a roller derby team. They practice three nights a week after my parties are done and bout on Saturday nights every five or six weeks. They take complete care of themselves and my building, and for their bouts, we split the door; they range from 400 to 800 spectators at \$12 to \$15 per head.

One downer for our business was the decision to stop Saturday night sock hops. They brought in so much money in years past, but brought the most headaches and bad PR. After 30 years, the rowdy teens and some of the illegal behavior that they brought into the rink was just too much for our limited security to handle, and we are working on building our Saturday nights back up with other programs that are more oriented toward young kids and



Mike Jacques taught Maureen Thomas (center) and her husband and their daughter, Melody Neill (right). They all turned pro at Roller King and have been skating there for 35 years. Melody's daughter, Charlene Neill (left), skated and worked at Roller King. She now brings her daughter, Destiny Neill (front), to the rink for lessons with grandma Melody.

families.

Lastly, my daughter started a new session on Wednesday mornings for Moms and tots! She not only did a session, but also a lesson from 9:30 to 10 and free skate after 'til 11:30. Now my wife Pat has to go down and help her with the class. My two-year-old granddaughter is right out there with the three, four, and five year olds doing the Hockey Pokey and Chicken Dance. These are our future, and we never forget it.