

HOT SPOT

By Art Snyder

Good news never stops. That's the word for your rink as 2009 winds down in a flurry of rink activity, as everyone from Coca-Cola to Surf Sweets to Hollywood, 5-Hour Energy and a host of others step up on your behalf. Below are all the profit-friendly details.

Surf Sweets Gummy Bears, Sour Berry Bears

Inspired by the sunny lifestyle of California, Surf Sweets bagged candies — for vending machine and rack sales alike — are made from organic and natural ingredients, with authentic fruit flavors tailored to the taste demands of young consumers. Naturally sweet, organic ingredients are the hallmark of Surf Sweets Gummy Bears and Surf Sweets Sour Berry Bears, and each variety is available in a new 0.9-ounce



snack-pack size. Fresh packaging design is part of a new, integrated graphic identity that tells consumers that Surf Sweets Gummy Bears and Surf Sweets Sour Berry Bears are the fun brand of chewy-chompy sweets. These candies are slated to be available nationwide

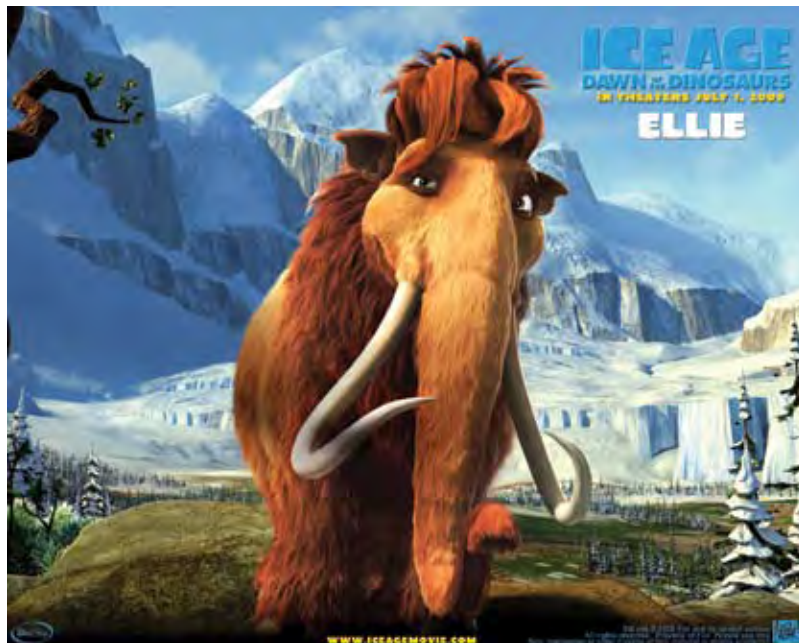
by the end of the year. For more, visit surfsweets.com.

Coca-Cola Freestyle™ beverage dispenser

The future is almost here. That's the great news from Coca-Cola, as the company has been conducting extensive market tests of the fountain dispenser they've named Coca-Cola Freestyle™. This proprietary fountain dispenser is a sleek, freestanding unit sized much like a traditional soft drink vending machine, but with a remarkable twist: Thanks to a touch-sensitive LCD screen of the Coca-Cola Freestyle™,

Coca-Cola, Frito-Lay, Chex Mix and more

the consumer can make an interactive choice of any of more than 100 varieties — yes, 100! — of the entire Coca-Cola family of sparkling beverages, waters, juices and teas. Make a selection, then watch as a cup fills with ice and your chosen fountain favorites. If Coca-Cola makes it, the eager consumer can buy it at a Coca-Cola Freestyle™ fountain dispenser: Raspberry Coke, Strawberry Sprite, Tab, Diet Coke, Nestea Lemon, Cherry Coke Zero, Full Throttle Coffee®, Orange Tangerine DASANI Plus, Barq's Root Beer, Fresca Sparkling Citrus, Simply Lemonade, Fanta Grape and more than 90 others! All the time! To see a Coca-Cola Freestyle™ demonstration video, visit YouTube on the Internet at <http://bit.ly/f3kQ7>. (As more becomes known of the availability of Coca-Cola Freestyle™, we'll give you the latest information.)



5-Hour Energy

The energy-shots sub-category of refreshing, active-life beverages has displayed remarkable growth and promise in these challenging economic times, so be sure to stock the brand or brands that your customers want. Of course, industry movers and shakers like Coca-Cola and PepsiCo, and powerful independents like Monster and Red Bull, have to be considered for their dominant energy and energy-shots brands. Living Essentials, the makers of 5-Hour Energy also has to be in the race. How so? Look at the 5-Hour Energy sales record for the past 12 months alone: \$500 million. That's a

lifestyles," which would be your rink customers. The MATADOR line should be available nationally this fall via your Frito-Lay supplier, so talk to him or her and get your specials under way.

Accent on Hollywood

Hollywood hits can be your secret to success when you see how they can spice up your rink profit centers all year long. Licensed fare in your vending and redemption areas. Themed sessions for teens, middle-schoolers and younger skaters. DVD drawings and giveaways during those sessions. Specially tailored birthday parties. Videogames based on celluloid superstars and fantasy characters. All of this can be yours, and it can pay off as long as you're in tune with Hollywood and the likes of your customers. With that in mind, look to a number of hits from the past year or so, as well as a few others from earlier this decade. Toy Story and Toy Story 2 lead the parade this fall, as they've been reformulated and reissued as 3-D films. Look, too, to these other gold-plated films to generate excitement and profits all over your calendar, seven days a week: Ice Age 3: Dawn of the Dinosaurs, Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen, Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince, Star Trek, Monsters vs. Aliens, X-Men Origins: Wolverine, Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs, Hannah Montana the Movie, Whip It, Zombieland, Coraline, Ghostbusters, Finding Nemo, The Incredibles, Wall-E, The Dark Knight, Ratatouille, Lord of the Rings, The Monsters and Spider-Man 2. (See the September/October issue of The RINKSIDER for Page 1 and other in-depth coverage of several of these films.)

In brief

•PepsiCo is gearing up for a "massive Gatorade transformation." The company will offer reformulated beverages for various athletic and active-lifestyle needs, according to a company spokesman. Plan details about

lot of demand, and it's a demand that has jumped 30 percent in 2009. When your area distributor of 5-Hour Energy comes knockin' — answer the door, fast. 5-Hour Energy can make your rink bottom line glow this winter, with all the school and hockey sessions, so get that brand in your beverage rotation.

Frito-Lay, Jack Link's partnership

The "meat snacks" category of handy customer treats — Slim Jim is the sales leader — has been getting ever stronger, so it's time to promote heading into 2010. PepsiCo's Frito-Lay division and Jack Link's Beef Jerky this year agreed to have Frito-Lay sell and distribute a new array of meat snacks under the MATADOR by Jack Link's banner. Better still, this snack is targeted for "young adults with action-driven

the products should be forthcoming in November.

•The Red Bull Soapbox Race in Los Angeles this year drew 111,000 fans, the company reported, to underscore Red Bull commitment to sports of all sorts. Yes, this plays into your company customer profile, so stock up with Red Bull.

•The Coca-Cola Co. will actively promote its Far Coast coffee and tea brands at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver. Get your Coca-Cola supplier in hand to dovetail your rink specials on those beverages, along with appropriate signage for your sports-enthusiast customers.

•Children mean genuine opportunity for major sales growth with foods, snacks and beverages, according to a report from New Nutrition Business. The U.S. market for children's consumables is forecast to grow by 50 percent within two years, going from \$16 billion in 2007 to \$27 billion by 2010.

•Dr Pepper Snapple executives see huge opportunity with market trends that suggest the next hot growth area in beverages will be in the coconut waters category. The recent Natural Products Expo East event showed Vita Coco as the dominant brand in the coconut-water category, and major beverage producers are readying their brands to enter this category. Stay tuned for developments.

•The FUZE mission of nutritious beverages continues, as the promising, innovative company introduced two new flavors in September: Goji Wild Berry Flavored Empower and Agave Goji Berry Flavored White Tea. Also, the company this fall introduced a new member to the FUZE tea line: FUZE Agave Goji Berry Flavored White Tea, a light tea with a pronounced flavor profile. These line additions are in the FUZE portfolio with 18 other flavors of FUZE drinks.

•The Subway restaurant chain — known for their “Eat Fresh” submarine sandwich way of life for customers around the world — is on the FUZE iced-tea bandwagon. They offer FUZE beverages through their 22,500 restaurants throughout the United States, and that should boost demand for FUZE beverages at your rink. FUZE is a product of Coca-Cola and should be available from coast to coast.

•Red Bull is stepping into the burgeoning energy-shot market this year, citing a market need for a premium brand in this beverage segment. Red Bull is meeting this call with Red Bull Energy Drink. Ask your distributor of the brand for specials, signage, marketing and other promotional materials.

•With more than a dozen varieties of Chex Mix bagged snacks, General Mills is not sitting still. They recently added a Chex Mix Jalapeno Cheddar variety, which should see excited response and demand from young skaters in general, and perhaps even greater reception from those of Hispanic, Thai

and other ethnic backgrounds that often key in on hot or spicy foods. Do every-



one a favor with Chex Mix Jalapeno Cheddar this winter.

•In a word: relax. That's the message from the beverage company that

offers Purple Stuff Pro-Relaxation & Calming Elixir. Seen to have good growth potential, this calming drink format is a tasty alternative to the raft of beverages jacked up with caffeine and similar enhancements. Purple Stuff ought to do well with many skaters of all age groups.

•Jones Soda is debuting Zilch by the end of the year. It's a zero-calorie soft drink that's sweetened with Splenda and fortified with vitamin C, and it's



formulated in several flavor-varieties: Pomegranate, Vanilla Bean and Black Cherry. Time to “get Jonesing” with a popular, newer drink partner.

•7-Eleven stores in some markets in the South will be carrying and promoting DNA Energy Drinks. That, in turn, should heighten customer demand for the energy brand — in three flavors: Citrus, Lemon Lime and Citrus Sugar Free — at your rink. Take heed and parlay 7-Eleven advertising dollars for your rink as you head into 2010. Happy New Year!

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

Fla. operator shares strategies for healthy business in tough times

By Dionne Obeso

Bob Bentley is the owner of Dreamland Skating Center in Pensacola, Fla. His business has remained active and healthy during the economic recession due to his hard work and his focus on giving the customers what they want in a skating rink. The excellent customer service that Bentley insists upon also surely plays a large part in the popularity of his skate center.

“I have been talking with several operators, and they all agree that roller skating rinks are the ‘biggest bang for the buck’ when it comes to entertainment. Roller skating is cheap and fun, and keeps people happy,” shared Bentley. “Rinks are both up and down right now, and the ones that are up are the ones that keep their kids skating while they’re there. The ones that encourage them to dance and hang out seem to lose business, because when times are tough, kids realize that they can do those same things for free at the mall or at home.”

Keep interest on the skating floor

He encourages rink operators to coax their skaters into spending the maximum time on the floor by hosting skating games and skate floor activities during sessions.

“We’re currently skating more skaters in every facility - attendance is way up. The problem is that per person spending went way down, so we were not bringing in the money on things like snacks and novelties,” shared Bentley. “That’s a problem! So when per person

sales went down, we added a glow cart loaded up with light up toys, glow sticks, and glow in the dark stuff, and started to have blackout skates during every session to encourage kids to buy the glow items.”

The easier access to the flashing and glowing toys combined with the blackout skate brought their sales back up, with a little help from deals in concessions.

“As skating rinks we already have great value, so discounting admissions won’t do much good,” insists Bentley. “Instead, we encourage people to spend their money once they’re in the door with things like food and drink specials and the glow cart. Our income went from \$13-14 per person to \$10-11 when the recession hit, so we focused on adding value and also on that ‘fun, feel good feeling’ to bring our per person back up.”

Reach out to more age groups

Bentley doesn’t necessarily want to encourage people to jump in on late night skates, since night skaters can be rough or destructive sometimes, so instead of offering specials on the evening skates, he focused on the earlier crowd. “We have dollar skate nights from 5-8 for stay home moms and that sort of group. If you do cheap skates in the evening for the 7-9 sessions, you might get some undesirables mixed in with the other skaters. Everyone in the world might come in. You don’t have that problem so much in the afternoon.”

Use targeted and consistent advertising

Bentley also suggests advertising, especially to your loyal customer base. A mom who drops off her ten-year-old for skate sessions might not be aware of the day care aspect, so keeping customers informed is a great way to get old customers to cross over to new areas. “We have an in-house mailing list to promote things like day care. We keep contests running, send out direct mailings, and make sure to promote events, parties, and other things that the kids don’t want to miss doing. We’re working harder than ever to advertise to our community and keep them interested,” said Bentley.

“Keep it fun, and keep them entertained. We’re a great value, just keep them happy, keep your place clean, and they will come. We didn’t cut back on appearance or what we do to make some sessions fun. We may change vendors, but we don’t cut expenses much; we just promote very well.”

Focus on the customer

In closing, Bentley urged operators to focus on providing good customer service. “You start cutting back on labor – firing people or cutting hours - and people start standing in line. They don’t like that! Customer service, I think, is tops. We need to set ourselves apart from the bowling alley or the movie theater.”

While there are lots of places to go for an evening’s entertainment, skating centers can and should be the one to go to for the personal service and the best value for every dollar.