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A Day in the Life of *ampm*

THE PREDOMINANTLY FRANCHISED CHAIN TAPS INTO ITS MOJO AS IT NEARS ITS 40TH ANNIVERSARY AND 1,000TH STORE

By Melissa Kress & Danielle Romano

The latest *Convenience Store News* Top 100 report finds Houston-based BP North America at No. 6 with a total store count of approximately 7,100 locations. Those operate primarily under the *ampm*, ARCO, BP, BP Connect and BP Shop banners.

One of these banners is gearing up for an exciting year ahead. *ampm* has a strong presence dating back to 1978 alongside ARCO-branded fuel locations. Today, the *ampm* network spans five western states: Arizona, California, Nevada, Oregon and Washington.

A majority franchise operation, *ampm* is not only coming up on its 40th anniversary, but it is also eyeing its 1,000th location along its journey to kick the definition of “convenience” up a notch on the nation’s West Coast.



Regional Sales Manager Brandi Gaston (left) chats with franchisee Daljit Bains.



TAKING IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

With almost 40 years under its belt, *ampm* is taking steps to bring its offer to the next level. Known as “Project Mojo,” the brand is in the midst of rolling out a program with new in-store graphics, a new coffee program, and a new fresh food program.

“We are dialing up the offer, making it current and fresh, and aligned with the trends we see around our consumer base,” Donna Sanker, BP chief operating officer, explained to *Convenience Store News* during its visit to the brand’s La Palma, Calif., headquarters to conduct this year’s *CSNews* “A Day in the Life” of a c-store retailer series.

ampm is on a journey to significantly grow its business over the next five years, “so it’s an exciting time,” she said, adding that BP and its franchisees are invest-

them across nearly 1,000 sites.

The Project Mojo initiative has been the pinnacle of Orsbourn’s tenure so far. The goal of the project is exactly what it sounds like: maintain and enhance the mojo at *ampm* with an updated store image and offers that consumers are demanding.

For *ampm*, mojo means the inclusion of various things, such as a more robust coffee program, the roll-out of a proprietary fresh food program, and improvements to the overall store image.

As part of Project Mojo, BP is introducing new interior graphics to its *ampm* stores. Interior graphics can create a warm, attractive and fun atmosphere, if done right, and invite customers to “linger for longer for potential basket-building results,” noted Orsbourn.

As with most c-store retailers who periodically



Improvements to the overall store image are a key part of *ampm*’s “Project Mojo.”

ing a lot of money in the business. “We’ve got some big things in the hopper to come.”

Near the top of the hopper is food. One difference between the convenience store scenes on the West Coast of the United States vs. the East Coast is the level of foodservice, with the West Coast lagging behind. The disparity may stem from the larger number of food options on the West Coast, whether it’s fast-casual or quick-service restaurants, or even food trucks.

“There is such a range of options for food because it is so heavily populated,” Sanker said. “Regardless, many of the convenience retailers you see here are trying to advance and elevate their offers.”

RAMPING UP ITS MOJO

As BP’s director of convenience marketing for the *ampm* brand, Carl Orsbourn and his team are faced with how to implement new programs and deploy

refresh their dispensed beverage program, *ampm* knew it was time to revitalize its offering. Entering into a new playing field for the brand with the latest customer craze, the brand is introducing cold brew coffee and frozen coffee. The debut of both products will help consumers recognize that they can get a good quality and differentiated beverage solution at *ampm*, Orsbourn explained.

“*ampm* represents customization and variety. At *ampm*, it’s about the consumer being able to make their own beverage the way they want it,” the director of convenience marketing said.

If Orsbourn had to choose which initiative of Project Mojo he is most excited about, it would be the fresh food element because he firmly believes that foodservice — and all areas associated with it — is going to be an “important differentiator” for *ampm*.

Fresh food, in particular, has the ability to attract

new consumers, as well as draw out different missions from current consumers, he added. If *ampm* gets fresh food right, it will build further trust in the brand and heighten consumer perceptions about “gas station food” quality, he continued.

“There is no better job than mine right now. It’s a really exciting place to be one of the leaders of the brand’s further aspirations for success,” Orsbourn said.

MISSION POSSIBLE

Having a large footprint like *ampm* can prove daunting, though. Implementing a new program or making a change across the network can be “a big ship to move,” Sanker acknowledged.

“It is a gift and it is a challenge. It’s a gift because we have meaningful scale, but it certainly makes it challenging to roll things out,” she said.

Speed to market can be a challenge as well. “The world is changing so quickly. We keep a close watch on these changes, and keeping up is an area in which we try to press ourselves all the time,” Sanker said.

Challenging, yes, but not impossible.

As one of the leaders of a well-established brand in the convenience and fuel retailing industry, Orsbourn is keenly aware that his role goes beyond that of a typical marketing director. He has made it his personal mission to foster a culture of belief that what initially seems unachievable is indeed possible.

“If I can help people understand that one day we can have a higher transaction mix of consumers coming in to the store to purchase something in addition to gas, then that would be tremendous,” Orsbourn expressed to *CSNews*.

He is faced with several core challenges. An important one is identifying and prioritizing the exciting list of opportunities to grow and improve the *ampm* offer. Because the brand functions in a franchise environment, how to engage and sell offer innovation across nearly 1,000 sites can likewise present a challenge.

“Franchisees are brilliant entrepreneurs — they have great ideas and thoughts about what it takes to drive their business forward and take it to the next level. However, taking those ideas and applying them across a network of nearly 1,000 sites is challenging,” Orsbourn explained.

To overcome this challenge, *ampm* engages in frequent and open conversations with its franchisees to hear what’s on their minds and share exciting developments being made within the overall offer. Then, the team takes into consideration the demographics and consumer behaviors in each region and works with



Another significant element of *ampm*’s “Project Mojo” is the rollout of a proprietary fresh food program.

franchisees to deliver achievable individual goals.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Growth at *ampm* is occurring through its network and offer by ensuring *ampm* is a place that consumers can come visit to help manage their busy lives with true convenience solutions.

Orsbourn said the brand is focused on strategies for 2018 and beyond.

“We ask ourselves, ‘What’s an *ampm* in 2020 going to feel like and look like to our consumer? How can we aspire to something bigger, bolder and better than anyone else?’” he said. *CSN*