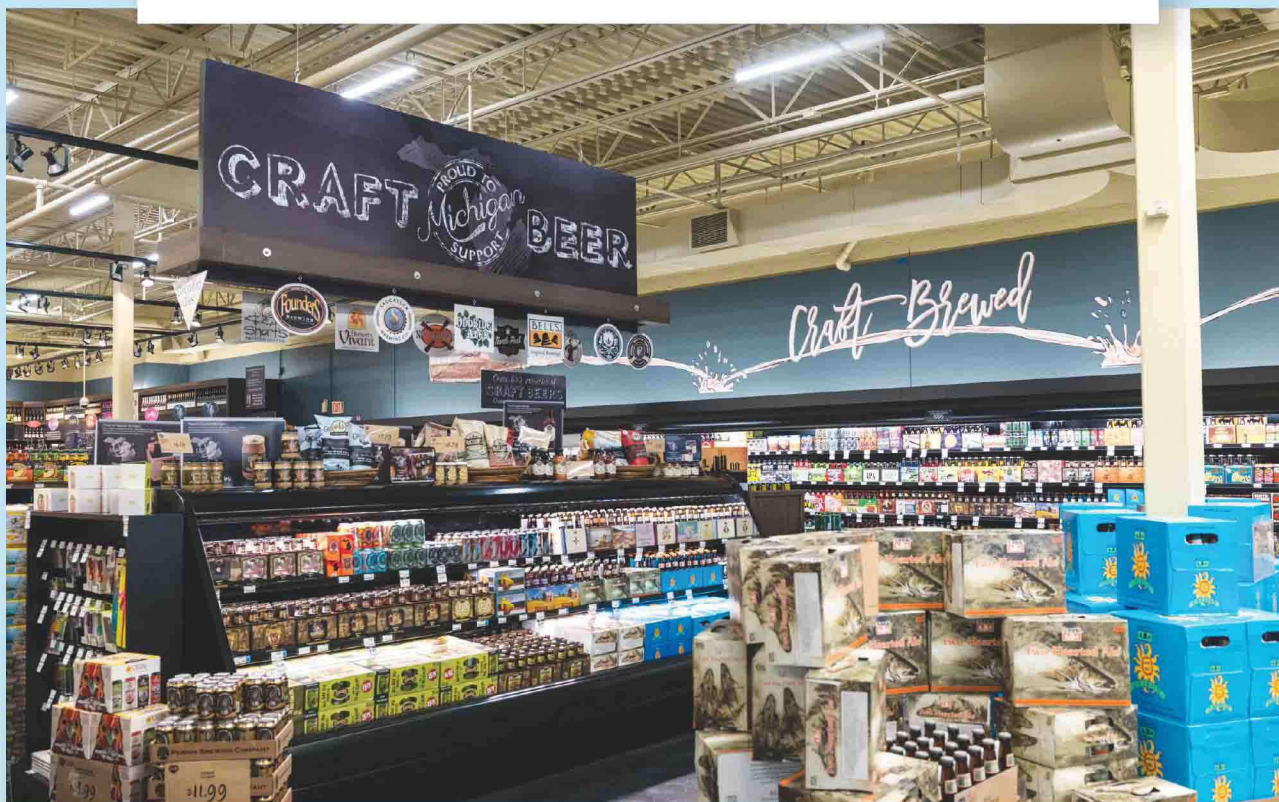


# Sending a Message

Supermarket signage is becoming a versatile merchandising tool.

By Bob Ingram



**B**uild it high and watch it fly” is no longer the mantra of the food retailing merchandiser. For today’s successful food merchandising, signage is key.

“Creating signage is the combination of art and science,” asserts Bridget Kwok, director of marketing at Andronico’s Community Markets, in Emeryville, Calif. “Each sign must be eye-catching and appealing while still offering the customer important pieces of information. Retailers also need to be mindful of not overwhelming their customers with too many signs.”

According to Kwok, Andronico’s everyday signage is divided into what she calls three “buckets”: price and item, providing basic information; romance/story, shelf tags offering more information, often provided by the producer of an artisanal or local product, or one with a unique angle; and programs/promotions, typically perpendicular shelf tags, floor signs, hanging banners or blades to share new partners with customers, or to publicize program launches, new items and their attributes.

“Alongside those staples,” Kwok says, “we sprinkle in seasonal signage and special promotions signage. Signage is also a huge part of our seasonal décor package. We create bespoke signs of all sizes and



**BEER HERE**  
SpartanNash stores, including 11 D&W Fresh Market locations in Michigan, feature informational craft beer signage.



#### MARKETING MATERIAL

A storefront by Archer Sign for Krieger's Market in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, promotes the grocer's brand.



shapes to fit the theme of a season.”

Kwok sees the company's FitMarket flags as “incredibly impactful. They're black with bright-green detail and really stand out on the shelves next to the products,” as well as being a mixed bag of information about nutrition and eating “real” food, with some even conveying cheeky, fun fitness messages. They all tie back to the FitMarket department, where the goal is to help customers create balance between how they shop, cook, eat, exercise, and recharge throughout

their lives and their shopping trips.

“Our outdoor vinyl banners are also extremely impactful,” Kwok adds. “They are great at grabbing the attention of passersby on foot or by car.

“Those who have been to the new [Whole Foods] 365 store in Los Angeles,” she goes on to note, “have seen the future of signage, which lies in digital.” The digital shelf tags there can be changed and updated remotely, as well as keep inventory, and there are also sleek digital end cap displays that rotate messages every 10 seconds.

“The beauty of digital signage is that it's clean, can rotate through multiple messages about a product and can promote a complementary product,” Kwok observes, “and it can promote any programs in the store. As a marketer, that's an attractive trait.”

#### Integration, Personalization Growing

Ron Cox, director of marketing at Grand Rapids, Mich.-based SpartanNash, says: “Signage has two primary roles in our stores, the first being directional, whether aisle directory, ‘wayfinders’ in aisles, or other tools that help guide the customer through the store. The second purpose is informational; that can include item description, price, promotional pricing, nutrition information, local attribution, and, at times, recipes, key product attributes, digital coupon availability, or even QR [quick response] codes to link to additional information. Brand messaging would fall into this category as well. We also display signs for sponsorship events, community support and SpartanNash Foundation activities.”

Cox adds that the company is currently testing digital point of sale (POS) with displays featuring animation in fresh departments and at free-standing video kiosks by entrance areas in the Omaha, Neb., market.

“Information spans from pure product information to nutritional information, community news, offers, promotions, branding and seasonal information,” he notes.

Cox sees the most effective signage as right in front of the product, and the integration of digital



signs and digital devices as a growing trend. “The ability to scan a sign offering a digital coupon and have it load direct to a card is one example,” he says.

“With the continuing shift to personalization, we see the potential to reduce signage in-store as customers will be shopping with ‘personal’ deals not relevant to all, and these may be called out via their cellphone as they shop, based on what is relevant to their specific account,” Cox continues.

### Get to the Point

On the supplier side, Tara Strauss, an executive in business development at Canton, Ohio-based Archer Sign, says: “The storefront is becoming a great piece of marketing material. I see supermarkets using a photo of the store in everything from newspaper fliers to online banners.”

She adds that supermarkets have been moving toward energy-efficient signs by using LED instead of neon or incandescent light, although Archer’s client Marc’s, a Middleburg Heights, Ohio-based chain with more than 60 stores, “loves to use bright neon signs to direct their customers around the store. At Archer Sign, we have a full in-house neon shop, which most sign companies don’t have.”

Strauss believes that electronic message centers are the future of signage. “These digital display boards can get a message to the consumer before they even get in the door,” she points out. “With the numerous options available, there is a digital signage option out there for every budget.”

For his part, Didier Blanc, president of Blanc Display Group, in Dover, N.J., says that signage plays a “huge” part in supermarket marketing and merchandising programs.

“Whatever message a supermarket wants to convey, it cannot be effective and successful if it is not present at the point of purchase,” Blanc emphasizes. “It can be as simple as indicating sales items to providing product information — selection, nutritional information, storage, recipes, for instance — to reinforce a supermarket’s desire to be perceived as a better place to shop, which is becoming even more critical as brick-and-mortar stores strive to keep customers from purchasing online.”

Blanc Display Group’s most recent innovations are Signature Series Headers, which provide buyer’s guide information for many of the most common produce categories, and the World of Produce Buyer’s Guide, including large category headers that highlight produce staples for a variety of cultures and cuisines such as Hispanic, Asian, Mexican, French, Italian and Caribbean, in addition to smaller complementary inserts and toppers that incorporate QR code links to recipes and other product information for specific items.

“We have made large investments in informative



**GERM-FREE**  
Plastic bakery price tags from Evolis eliminate the risk of contamination.

content and added user-friendly QR codes to our signage that link to this content,” Blanc continues.

He notes that signage will continue to be a key merchandising and marketing tool and that his company is designing its signage to be the vehicle to provide shoppers with an experience they can’t get online.



### Plastic Price Tags

Lissette Robledo, marketing manager of the Fort Lauderdale, Fla.-based American subsidiary of Evolis Inc., a French company, says marketers will have to pay special attention to the way they tag their fresh food items, given the new FDA guidelines, which will take effect next May and require that calorie counts and other important details be listed on food price tags.

“Our core business is the design and production of plastic card printers,” Robledo explains. “We saw a need for supermarkets to eliminate their current price-tag logistics and time delays. Most importantly for price tags that are printed on plastic cards, there is no need to worry about food contamination.”

The company’s solution combines an Evolis Zenius or an Evolis Primacy card printer for single- or double-sided printing, card design software, and all of the accessories to hold the tag. The cards can include barcodes and QR codes that can be easily scanned by any mobile device. A price tag can be issued with NFC (near-field communication) functionality embedded and approach a smartphone to receive recipe and other information.

“We would like to see the implementation and expansion of plastic price tags in the United States as they have already been in many European countries,” Robledo says. **PG**

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