

Q & A with Tim Rafter and Russell Large, McCowan Design & Manufacturing Limited

1) Please briefly discuss the equipment and services McCowan offers c-store retailers.

McCowan is Canada's one-stop shop offering high quality, heavy duty modular metal store fixture systems serving independent and chain c-store retailers coast to coast. McCowan supplies cash counters, foodservice prep and self-serve counters, shelving, security and tobacco solutions, exterior signage, and in the case of c-store gas bars, outdoor 'forecourt' merchandisers. It manufactures everything it sells in its Toronto plant, allowing for fast delivery. McCowan also provides store layout and plan-o-grams, vendor contacts, design and engineering services, global sourcing, and installation; everything you need to open up your c-store.

2) What are some of the biggest issues c-store retailers face in terms of store design (size, budget, too much product, etc)?

C-store retailers are under increasing pressure due to the blurring of retail channels — competition from grocery stores, big-box retailers and drug stores — all claiming to offer "convenience" to the same customer. The role of the today's c-store is to provide fast, on-the-go products and services to customers in close proximity to the store. Store sizes, competition and offerings differ depending on the c-store site (rural vs. urban vs. highway). Today's c-store customers are more discerning and health conscious, expecting a wide range of high quality products and services at fair prices in a clean and safe environment. C-stores need to use every square foot of their space efficiently and effectively in order to maximize sales and profitability.

3) What are some of the solutions to overcome these issues?

To overcome these challenges, c-store retailers must know what their customers want and what their competition offers. Understanding a store's strengths and weaknesses will allow the c-store retailer to make a wish-list of how his store can change. This information can assist in the design of a store layout and a plan-o-gram. (A store layout is a scaled drawing of your store that takes into account the footprint, size, type and placement of fixtures, cash and foodservice counters, lighting and equipment. A plan-o-gram is a detailed diagram of a shelf, fixture or

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section showing the location and space to be occupied by each product and is based on your store's demographics and competition.) When plan-o-grams are teamed with the correct fixtures, lighting and equipment, the result is higher inventory turns increasing sales and profit per square foot. It is recommended that c-stores partner with a company like McCowan to advise on the current market conditions and offer design and fixturing solutions.

4) Are there trends in counter and fixture design for c-stores?

C-stores are moving upscale and fixtures are an integral part of achieving this look. Fixtures also help to highlight a brand/image through the use of co-ordinated, customized finishes, materials and colour.

Modular or interchangeable fixtures offer the flexibility to highlight key products and services and to change the fixture's use over time. Perimeter and floor shelving fixtures allow for high-capacity merchandising, while feature tables or four-sided merchandisers permit a variety of configurations for smaller impulse items.

Recent studies have shown that consumers want their store checkout experience to be faster. Cash counters need to be designed to accommodate the latest POS technology and queuing to speed up the checkout process. Convenience store retailers are discovering that a centrally located cash counter reduces theft and maximizes customer satisfaction, improves

brand loyalty, and opens up new opportunities for high-margin impulse sales.

C-store consumers want faster and healthier food & beverage offerings. Many are adding QSRs (Quick Service Restaurants) to strengthen their location's appeal. This trend has resulted in the need for innovative designs in foodservice prep areas and self-serve foodservice counters. These counters have to be manufactured to withstand a wet environment that must be kept sanitary. Cabinets, shelving and drawers made of heavy duty steel with durable finishes, combined with powder coated steel, stainless steel or solid surface countertops are the best way to stand up to the demands of today's foodservice areas.

Store fixtures, combined with proper store layout and lighting, allow customer traffic to flow easily through the store and to use valuable store space effectively. Store fixtures allow the customer to quickly find what they need to buy and see high impulse, higher margin items that they will want to buy.

5) Are there certain kinds of store counter and fixture configurations that work best for c-stores?

Every c-store is different, requiring a custom store layout and merchandising plan. Depending on the site configuration, the size of the store, and the location of the entrance, for example, a cash counter backing against a wall or an island style configuration is preferable.

Island cash counters can improve customer flow and encourage customers to walk past dis-

plays of impulse items, which can serve to increase sales. There are many innovative styles and sizes of specialty store fixtures that are ideal for small impulse items, and the more typical snack, grocery, and household items.

Now that tobacco sales has gone 'dark' in Canada, using the back wall for merchandising tobacco can be eliminated and these products can be moved into under counter drawers. In many cases, this will allow a centre island cash counter configuration where the retailer has better sightlines throughout the store, improving security.

6) What things should a retailer consider when selecting counters and fixtures?

The c-store retailer should always have their customer in mind when selecting counters and fixtures. The most important factors a retailer should consider are the counters and fixtures' function, esthetic appeal, and their durability, modularity, flexibility and total life cycle cost.

In today's competitive c-store industry, the co-ordinated look of the c-store is more critical than ever and maintaining that look over the years is just as important. The type of material used in the manufacturing of counters and fixtures affects its longevity; while wood is initially less expensive, it does not stand up to heavy traffic, moisture and salt. McCowan's modular counter systems and fixtures are manufactured from a steel structure that includes zinc coatings and a durable powder coat finish that is designed to look good for years. Metal looks better longer.



Our Industry...we get it!

We understand the unique needs of c-store, gas bar and small footprint retailers.

McCowan specializes in...Paypoint Cash Counters Foodservice Counters Gondola & Shelving
Forecourt Merchandisers Dark Market Solutions Signage