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## The Blur Factor

Jan 6, 2004

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*Walgreens adds sandwiches, bakery in some stores*

By Steve Holtz

DEERFIELD, Ill. -- Recent changes at Walgreen Co. drugstores are improving the chain's in-store marketing and continuing the channel blurring that has been going on for several years.

For most of Walgreen's more than 100-year history, the pharmacy has sold c-store staples such as milk, single-serve beverages and cigarettes. But the chain of about 4,300 stores upped the ante in its channel blurring in December when it put bakery and wrapped-sandwich kiosks into some of its stores in the Chicago area. Advertising "low-cal/low-fat gourmet meals" from \$1.99 to \$5.99, the sandwich rack in one store offered eight kinds of sandwiches, as well as wraps, pasta and both fruit and vegetable salads. The kiosk happens to be topped with a small Starbucks cooler filled with the Seattle coffee company's ready-to-drink beverages.



The bakery kiosk included bagels, muffins, cookies and croissants "delivered fresh daily." Attempts by *CSP Daily News* to reach Deerfield, Ill.-based Walgreen Co. to discuss plans to further rollout of the kiosks or address whether they are a test were unsuccessful.

Meanwhile, Walgreens has turned to technology to improve its in-store merchandising, according to a report in the *Chicago Sun-Times*.

For years, workers have dreaded climbing ladders and struggling to hang signs by string from the ceiling of Walgreen stores. Walgreen executives also hated the resulting injuries to workers and their resulting workers' compensation claims, according to the report, and not knowing whether or where the signs were hanging.

Enter Annette Ricci, 39, whose success in producing a sign-hanging technology prompted her to create a new company, Reel E-Z Display.

Ricci, who works from Lake Forest, Ill., relied upon the expertise she built in the three years she has run a product design company called Design & Deliver. The result: Ricci now holds a patent for the sign-hanging device called the Reel E-Z Display.

Employees have to climb a ladder only to hang the devices from the ceiling. After that, they stand on the floor to hang and change the signs--an important issue because Walgreens changes its ceiling signs seven times a year. After the 1-lb. display unit is clipped to the struts of a drop ceiling, a worker uses a pole to pull down a bar on the unit and attach the sign to the bar.

The bar levels itself, and has adjustable cords with multicolored markings where a stopper can be placed. By using the markings as guides, workers can hang signs at the same height throughout a store.

Ricci thought about any number of scary scenarios when she designed the sign-hanging system with its stoppers: "I thought to myself, 'Maybe a 16-year-old hanging the sign would say, Let's race to the top, and a sign would fly off and hit someone.'" The bar doesn't snap back up to the



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ceiling when the sign is placed on it. Instead, workers must use the pole to guide the sign back up.

The units can be detached from the ceilings and moved around. The price of the units varies with the size of the order, but the retail price is about \$15 to \$17 per unit.

Companies can lease the ceiling space to outside vendors to generate extra revenue, although Walgreen Co. will not do so.

“This is a big labor-saving device,” Walgreen spokesperson Michael Polzin told the *Sun-Times*. “And it keeps the signs straight and looking good.”

Ricci said she has negotiated sales of the Reel E-Z Display unit to two U.S. distributors in addition to Walgreens.

“If I don’t have the particular experience, like the engineering, I can go to the [company’s] engineer and say, ‘How does this make sense? What could we do to make this even better?’ Together, it’s the creative thought process of several people,” she said.