

New 'service station' cuts costs for ExxonMobil

Last year Exxon Mobil Corp. introduced a new On the Run flagship store that fused together elements of its heritage Tigermarket and On the Run concepts. In creating the new store, the chain reviewed all elements of both heritage concepts—from the shingles on the roofs to the napkins in the dispensers—and came away with a hybrid that implemented the BOB, which is ExxonMobil-speak for "Best of Both."

The crown jewel of the new concept is the On the Run Café, a proprietary foodservice offer featuring fresh-made sandwiches and other finger foods. ExxonMobil Foodservice Category Manager Russ Ritenour says variety and condiments comprise the

backbone of his chain's enhanced food offer. With so many customers loading up their hot dogs and burgers with ketchup, mustard, onions and jalapeños, waste becomes an important issue. And that's why Ritenour is thankful for Server Products, which supplies the Server Express condiment pumps in ExxonMobil's 400 corporate and 100 franchised new On the Run stores.

"I was familiar with Server while with Exxon, prior to the merger," says Ritenour. "Once the merger took place, the two companies realized that they bought equipment from two different vendors, so we married the two and went with equipment that served the needs of both sides. The [Server Express] ketchup and mustard pumps offered a pouch that didn't have to be opened up; it was already sanitized and much easier than some of our pre-existing condiment-dispensing solutions."

With margins on key categories already sliced razor thin and labor pools drying up, c-store retailers like ExxonMobil are making up lost ground with profitable categories like foodservice. Server Vice President of Sales and Marketing Ron Ripple says the Server Express line's unique, simplified design helps retailers address both labor and cost-cutting concerns.

"The Server Express is a sanitary, sealed system, and because you're tapping into a sealed Cryovac® pouch, it's very tamper-resistant," says Ripple. "It has a push-down top that affords you excellent evacuation. The pouch collapses on itself as the product is pumped out, providing up to 98% evacuation. Open systems leave a good 10% of product in there, plus the new HACCP regulations say you're not supposed to add new product on top of old product."

Ripple says most other sealed systems are CO₂ driven, a feature that typically comes at a higher cost and requires additional parts.

"Execution is the biggest challenge for us, like any other operator," says Ritenour. "A key feature for us with the Server Express is the dispenser that has a pouch pack and doesn't need to be opened. It goes back to execution. If you don't have to worry about stores dumping new product in with old, you're better off."

"[The Server Express] makes it easier to execute at store level because there aren't any moving parts," Ritenour says. "Some pieces of equipment we still operate have moving parts, and they are 'show stoppers'; if you misplace a ball bearing or some other piece, the show stops—no more condiments."

The Server Express's standard two-year warranty on parts and service is a step above the one-year guarantee typical with many other condiment dispensers. But Ripple says that even though service and support for products are important, the tremendous savings in time and in reducing workers' compensation claims probably are the greatest benefits. The risk of injury to associates decreases greatly since there's no transport of heavy, condiment-filled cans.

The foodservice industry seems to have gotten on board with sealed pouch condiment units, since Server has installed more than 50,000 Server Express units in locations across the country. And the world's largest oil company has gotten behind it, too.

"The Server unit lends itself to hurtling major obstacles that we as a company and as an industry have faced," says Ritenour. "Any time where you can slash labor and reduce waste, you come out ahead."

—Bill Donabue

Server Express units come in various configurations, including the SE-SS #07030.

