

Driving Maintenance Sales

Gas prices, weather impact routine care for cars

Gas And Weather. Drivers use more than 10 billion gallons of gasoline each month, and gas prices have a direct correlation with how much drivers spend on routine maintenance, AutoZone executives say. Weather, unsurprisingly, also impacts car care. The abnormally dry weather in the west means few wiper blade sales.

Dr. Food. Kraft Foods, owner of brands such as Oscar Mayer, Capri-Sun and Jell-O, has 525 food scientists, chemists and engineers working on new product innovations. In terms of popularity, bacon is hot, but hot dog sales are slumping. Walmart accounts for 26 percent of all Kraft revenues.

Kale Juice. The January introduction of Kale-ribbean, a blend of mangoes, kale, Greek yogurt and chia seeds at Jamba Juice locations, has exceeded expectations. Company executives are now planning similar vegetable and fruit juice blends in the coming months. Jamba also signed an agreement with Target



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to introduce JambaGo, a mini-shop in 1,800 locations by year end.

Tax Men. The proportion of those who chose assistance with their tax returns versus those who do-it-themselves will remain consistent this year. However, through February, total U.S. tax returns by H&R Block was down 5.9 percent. There is opportunity for tax-return providers with Obamacare, with 46 changes to

the tax code because of this initiative.

No Beans. Bob Evans Restaurants lost \$2.5 million over the last few months because of a dispute with a key BEF food supplier. Side dish volume declined 9 percent as the restaurant chain was unable to serve many popular refrigerated side dishes. Meanwhile, half of Bob Evans diners who order the \$6.99 Sweet and Stacked pancake item opt for the breakfast meat upgrade.

Stale Grocers. Specialty grocery Fresh Market is exiting Sacramento, where it has three stores, and closing one Houston location. All were initially opened last year. Sales just did not support its capital investment, executives say. Instead, the chain will focus on growth in the Southeast, particularly Florida.

Cookies! Oreo is the most popular food brand on Facebook with 35 million fans, according to Oreo's parent company, Mondelez. Its other cookie division, Chips Ahoy, is introducing Ice Cream Shop, a new line

inspired by best-selling ice cream flavors.

Global Sales. 25 percent of PayPal transactions by U.S. sellers is to international buyers; eBay's sales ratio is 20 percent international. eBay also has a digital wallet with 140 million active users.

Ear Candy. Headphone maker Skullcandy is testing a line of lower-priced gear with Walmart beginning in the spring. Ear buds will be priced under \$20, headphones under \$35. There's no little concern that these products will cannibalize its higher-priced offerings. "Walmart is the store in many towns where there's no other or very limited Skullcandy, especially through the South and Midwest" say company executives. Last quarter, in-ear products generated 44 percent of total sales; 46 percent were on-ear or over-ear; 10 percent were speakers and accessories.

Big Chairs. Discount chain Big Lots is rolling out a furniture

financing program to reach 1,300 stores – 85 percent of its total store base – by fall 2014. "This program enables us to take down a barrier to a customer segment that relies heavily on this type of service. If they are not getting this type of liquidity at Big Lots, they are shopping elsewhere," Big Lots' CEO David Campisi says.

Drop-In Visits. Grocery shoppers spend \$415 billion on those quick, mid-week trips, in addition to their major stop, according to Walmart. The company is focusing on smaller stores, named Express and Neighborhood. There's no competition with their Supercenters. Shoppers spend an additional \$300 a year at Walmart when there's a smaller store located near a Supercenter. Still, the most successful smaller shops include both a pharmacy and gas.

Larissa Faw covers business trends for Forbes, The Motley Fool and other outlets. Contact her at larissafaw@gmail.com.

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