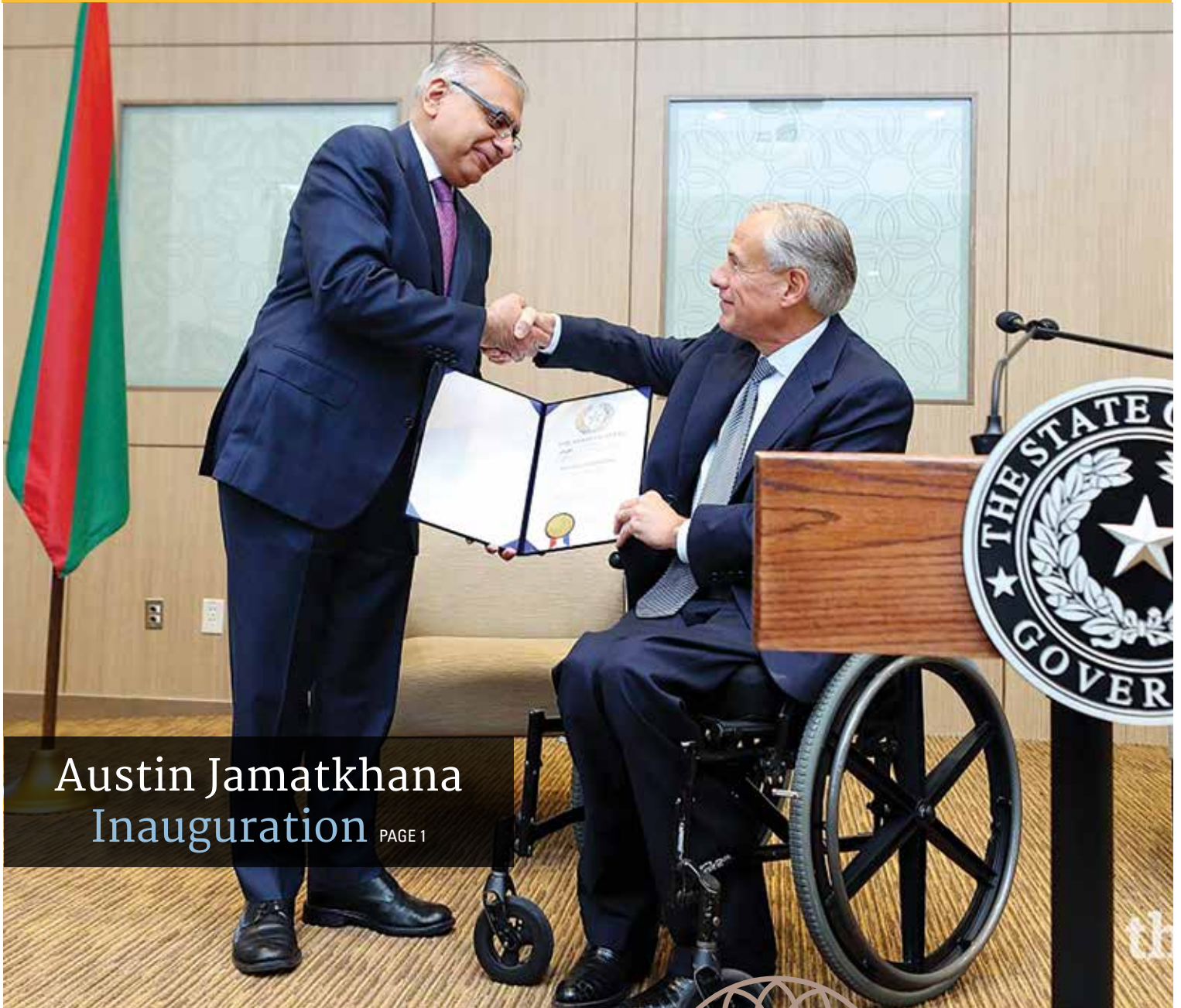


FALL 2018

GAMATM TIMES

Serving the convenience and petroleum retail industry in Austin since 1999

A PUBLICATION OF THE GREATER AUSTIN MERCHANTS COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION



Austin Jamatkhana Inauguration

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REGISTER FOR AKF GALA

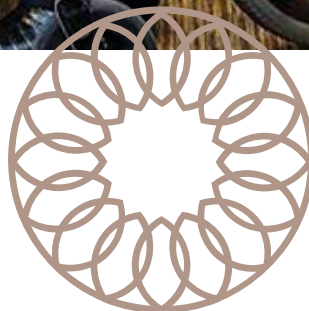
The November event combines
glitter, glamour, and
feel-good giving

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HELP FOR SMALL RETAILERS

10 ways small c-stores
can stay competitive in
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Did your store make
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EDITOR'S NOTE



SHAILA ABDULLAH
Editor-in-Chief

Welcome to the final issue of this year's quarterly *GAMA Times*. The local Ismaili community recently celebrated the opening of the long-awaited Austin Ismaili Jamatkhana. An Islamic architectural masterpiece with careful execution of the finer details, the facility will be a place of prayers and contemplation and invite broader community engagement.

Read about GAMA Director Jamshed (Jimmy) Manasiya, who may be new to the board but not a new face at GAMA. Also included in this issue are highlights from this year's Aga Khan Foundation golf tournament. We invite our members, vendors, partners, and well-wishers to participate in the inaugural AKF Gala at the Austin Central Library featuring fusion music, food, a silent auction, and more. Tickets are limited and on sale now. Do your part in supporting the foundation's work that helps millions of people each year in marginalized nations.

The focus of this issue is on helping small c-stores succeed and be competitive in today's marketplace. We have provided 10 tips to help retailers set themselves on that path. You can also read about six ways to assess and address store decline. Airbnb recently released its list of the best convenience stores in Austin. See if any of our GAMA-member stores made the list! Also in this issue is an informative Q&A with Pooja Sethi, Esq., about the recent laws affecting immigrants.

We welcome your feedback on this quarter's issue. If you have an exciting tip or news item to share for the next issue, please send it on to shailaabdullah@gmail.com.

PUBLICATION TEAM

Editor-in-Chief and Designer
Shaila Abdullah

Advisory Chair
Mehdi Ali

Publication & Advertising
Sanam Maknojia

Editorial Support
Shane Walker, Josh Coffee, Farah Nadeem



FEATURED

Texas Governor and Community Officials Inaugurate New Ismaili Jamatkhana

Nestled just outside Austin, the city of Cedar Park is now home to a new, permanent Ismaili Jamatkhana. In August, state, city, and local leaders from across Texas joined Jamati leaders and volunteers to open the new purpose-built space and share its vision.

UPON ARRIVING AT THE NEW JAMATKHANA, visitors were struck by its gleaming white facade. Many walked into the building for the first time and saw its iconic circular motif of eight overlapping circles, which adorn the exterior walls and outdoor waterfall feature.

Cedar Park Mayor Corbin Van Arsdale addressed the assembled guests, stating, “Cedar Park is a diverse community . . . and the Ismaili community brings additional diversity, professionalism, and a servant-hearted ethic that adds great value and quality to our experience in our community.” He talked about attending a Jamatkhana tour a few weeks earlier and being “struck by the warmth of the people here as well as the architecture and the feeling of the building itself.”



“This center is envisioned to be a place to build bridges and encourage dialogue between our civic organizations, civil society, and faith communities.”

– Dr. Barkat Fazal, president of the Ismaili Council for the United States

Dr. Barkat Fazal, president of the Ismaili Council for the United States, welcomed the guests and provided context on the purpose and functions of the Jamatkhana. Following President Fazal’s remarks, Texas Governor Greg Abbott delivered a keynote address in which he also acknowledged the Jamatkhana as “a place of civic and interfaith engagement—a place to share knowledge, to learn, and unite cultures.” He also recognized the Ismaili community’s dedication to volunteerism. He thanked the 2,500 Ismaili volunteers who dedicated more than 13,000 hours to the evacuation and recovery efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey, telling the 150-plus attendees that “Texas is forever thankful for the way these volunteers came together to help those in need.”

Following the remarks, Governor Abbott, Mayor Van Arsdale, and President Fazal stood together to unveil a commemorative plaque. Governor Abbott then presented a signed proclamation recognizing the opening ceremony of the Ismaili Jamatkhana.





After the opening ceremony concluded in the social hall, which is designed to accommodate educational and social events such as seminars and conferences, the guests gathered to greet one another under the Jamatkhana's rotunda, which features a large skylight to let in natural light. Here, they were able to view the Ethics in Action exhibit depicting the work of the Aga Khan Development Network and join guided tours of the building to learn about its architecture and many functions.

Attendees at the event included elected city, county, and state officials, as well as leaders from academic and healthcare institutions, interfaith leaders, and representatives from diverse civil society organizations.

Many marveled at the circular motif found in details from the Jamatkhana's carpeting to the metal latticework. The tessellating motif symbolizes unity and diversity in nature and is inspired by both traditional Islamic geometry and the clean, modern lines of mid-century architecture prevalent across the Austin area.

The total Jamatkhana space of more than 28,000 square feet, designed locally by the renowned Austin company Pfluger Architects,

includes dedicated areas for early learning classrooms, a library, religious education classrooms, and a small conference room, alongside a 7,000-square-foot prayer hall.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the event was that individuals from across diverse communities had all come together under one roof for this momentous occasion.

"I'm very impressed with the community, the center, and the outreach into the broader community. Just a minute ago, we had individuals from the Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu communities all in one circle of conversation," said Earl Maxwell, CEO of St. David's Foundation, an organization addressing the most pressing health challenges in the Central Texas region.

"It warms my heart to see a community that is all about inclusivity and gives it such a high value," said Simone Flowers, executive director of Interfaith Action of Central Texas. "This is such a beautiful place. . . . There's so much light, and the energy is really positive. I can't wait to have an interfaith event here." 🌟

Watch a video of the event: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=erhFbxsPm3M&feature=youtu.be>

This article was reproduced with permission from The Ismaili (<https://the.ismaili/>), the official website of the Ismaili Muslim community.

Senator Cornyn Visits Austin Jamatkhana

In September, Senator John Cornyn and members of his staff visited the new Ismaili Jamatkhana in Cedar Park. The presidents of the Aga Khan Councils for the Southwest and Central United States greeted the senator and accompanied him on a tour of the new facility.



MEET THE DIRECTOR

Jamshed (Jimmy) Manasiya



Jamshed (Jimmy) Manasiya may be one of the newest directors at GAMA, but he is not a new face at the organization. From 2011 to 2016, Manasiya worked as an accounting assistant at GAMA corporate. In his current role as a director of the warehouse, he monitors and provides oversight of the marketing, procurement, and accounting sectors.

Originally from Pakistan, Manasiya moved to the United States 17 years ago. He received his bachelor's degree in accounting from Texas State University. Prior to coming to GAMA, he worked as a shift manager at Metro Mart. Today, he owns and operates six stores in and around Austin with two under construction.

Manasiya lives in Austin with his wife and two children. ★

GAMA Cares



Cooling Off with Rising Star Water at the Austin Ice Cream Festival

GAMA was one of the sponsors of the 12th Annual Austin Ice Cream Festival at Fiesta Gardens in June. The family-friendly festival included sampling of 1.5 tons of frozen treats from local favorites and national brands, contests, fun activities, live entertainment, and local food trucks. GAMA donated water bottles to the event and was proud to be among major sponsors such as H-E-B, In-N-Out Burger, Camp Gladiator, Frost, and Topgolf. The event was featured last year in "Best Festivals in Texas" by Travelmag.com and "20 Ways to Have the Best Summer Ever" by *Jetsetter* magazine.



How Far Can You Swing?

A Closer Look at the Impact of AKDN Programs

The Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) is a respected organization that implements innovative and community-driven solutions in impoverished regions of the world.

PARTICIPATE: Register to attend the November 17 AKF Austin Gala at akfusa.org/austingala

DONATE: Your contribution goes a long way. Find out how you can donate at akfusa.org/get-involved/donate

VOLUNTEER: Reach out to Ahmed Moledina at austinevents@akfusa.org to become a volunteer

Each year GAMA receives and responds to calls to participate in the various initiatives of AKF and the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), which works in over 30 countries around the world. It currently operates approximately 1,000 programs and institutions, many of which date back over 60 years, and some over 100.

Most charity trackers rate the organization at 100% for accountability and transparency, but do you know how far your support goes when you pick up that golf club or don your best gear to show up at one of the AKF galas?

Here are some of the organization's far-reaching impacts:

- In 2017 alone, AKF improved 6,168 schools and reached more than 7,096 adult learners across Central Asia.
- AKDN universities have graduated more than 14,240 alumni globally.
- Over 2 million students benefit from AKDN education programs annually.
- 10 million people benefit from electricity as a result of efforts by AKDN.
- AKDN provides quality healthcare to 5 million people.
- Each year, AKDN reaches 1 million children under 8 years old.
- To reduce the high incidence of preventable deaths during childbirth in Afghanistan, AKDN has trained over 400 midwives in the country, about 10 percent of the total.
- The various city parks and gardens built by AKDN, such as Al-Azhar Park in Cairo, Egypt, provide tens of millions of urban dwellers with green space.

- Institutions such as the Global Centre for Pluralism (GCP) in Ottawa, Canada, help bridge and heal divisions across different faiths and between developed and developing countries.
- AKDN reaches 15 million people through social and cultural programs annually and 33 million people a year through economic activities.

Through its golf, walk, run, and gala events, AKF cultivates deep partnerships with local businesses, nonprofits, governments, and community leaders. As an initiative of AKF, the annual golf tournaments—held in several cities across the United States—raise awareness and funds for programs that transform the lives of communities around the world.

On September 17, Austin golfers participated in Aga Khan Foundation Golf at the University of Texas Golf

Club in Austin. The event raised approximately \$124,000 and was attended by 105 golfers and numerous supporters. The keynote speaker was Heather Jefts, Cedar Park City Council member.

“Promoting a cause that has historically made and continues to make a profound impact on the quality of life of the disadvantaged is a real honor for me,” said Ahmed Moledina, vice chairman of Aga Khan Foundation Southwest.

The success of these events depends heavily on the efforts of volunteers, individual supporters, donors, and various corporations. “We are grateful for our community of helpers who come together each year to ensure the success of the AKF events,” said Moledina, “but we are constantly looking for more support in terms of volunteers, donors, sponsors, and those who can be our voice to create greater awareness.” ✨

You are Invited

AGA KHAN FOUNDATION

Austin Gala

November 17, 2018 | 7-11 p.m.

Austin Downtown Library

TIME magazine's "world's greatest place"

You are cordially invited to a special evening of mocktails, a delicious 4-course meal prepared by an award-winning caterer, Ethics in Action, silent auction, and fusion music to fill the night air! Join AKF in supporting communities around the world build better futures.

\$150 each or \$1,500 per table
Black tie glamour attire encouraged.

REGISTER NOW

akfusa.org/austingala

Contact for more information

austinevents@akfusa.org

The Aga Khan Foundation is a private, not-for-profit international development agency founded in 1967.



AGA KHAN FOUNDATION



Tidbits at GAMA

- GAMA presented a check of \$7,000 to Honor Flight at the town hall meeting in September.
- Austin Mayor Steve Adler paid a visit to the town hall in September.
- This year Operation Blue Santa will take place at GAMA on December 6. Last year GAMA's toy drive resulted in the collection of more than 5,000 unwrapped toys as well as \$3,000 in donations.
- GAMA organized a free immigration seminar in August. The event was led by Pooja Sethi, Esq. A detailed Q&A with the attorney can be found on page 10.
- GAMA sponsored 20 tickets to the annual NACS show from October 7-10.
- GAMA-member stores who support Rising Star Coffee were able to participate in the Free Coffee Day on September 29. They also offered 99-cent coffee with purchase from September 17-October 1.
- The staff and directors at GAMA recognized the 19th anniversary of the association with cake and a celebration in October.



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SATURDAY AFTER THANKSGIVING

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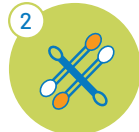
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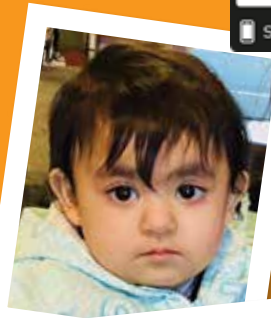
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BE READY TO DONATE IF
CALLED AS A MATCH



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Q&A *with* Immigration Attorney Pooja Sethi, Esq.

Q. What are the recent policy changes around immigrants that went into effect on September 11?

A. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) will begin to deny applications, petitions, and requests to file an application without sending an RFE (Request for Evidence) or NOID (Notice of Intent to Deny). Prior to September 11, they would send an RFE or NOID to ask for more evidence for each application with insufficient or irrelevant evidence.

The policy, which is described in the policy memo “Issuance of Certain RFEs and NOIDs; Revisions to Adjudicator’s Field Manual (AFM) Chapter 10.5(a), Chapter 10.5(b),” is an updated version of a 2013 policy that states that RFEs must be sent where there is a lack of evidence or the evidence did not accurately portray the applicant’s eligibility. This policy will be used in cases where an application asks for evidence and none is provided, among other types of cases.

Pooja Sethi, Esq., is an Austin-based immigration attorney and founder of Immigration for All, a nonprofit law firm that specializes in immigration law. She is the recipient of the Frank Morris Award and was recognized with a resolution by the State of Texas for her assistance with families who have been separated at the Texas-Mexico border.

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An immigration attorney will be able to help the applicant every step of the way. They will be able to make sure the application is thoroughly completed and the evidence is relevant and substantial to back up the application and prove why they are applying.

Q. Can you tell us more about RFEs and NOIDs?

A. RFE stands for Request for Evidence. An RFE is used when an application does not have sufficient evidence to prove eligibility. USCIS sends out an RFE to the applicant to send more evidence. NOID stands for Notice of Intent to Deny. An NOID is used when the adjudicator believes an application could be denied but would need additional evidence to make a clear decision. In the past, it was common to send RFEs and NOIDs. However, as of September 11, it is in the officer's discretion as to whether they want to send an RFE. The important note is that if the officer decides to not send an RFE, an applicant may get put into immediate deportation proceedings.

Q. Who does the new law affect?

A. This will affect applicants of both non-immigrant and immigrant visas as if there is a mistake with the evidence or the applicant has not provided enough relevant evidence, they may be denied without having a chance to send in more evidence. Applicants should make sure their application is 100% complete without any errors to avoid being denied.

Q. What recourse does someone have who is affected by the policy?

A. Once an application has been denied under this new policy, the applicant has the option to appeal the denial. The applicant must appeal within thirty days of the decision. USCIS will send a form I-292, which will describe why the adjudicator denied the application; the applicant must review that before appealing.



Q. What value can an immigration attorney bring in addressing this new policy?

A. An immigration attorney will be able to help the applicant every step of the way. They will be able to make sure the application is thoroughly completed and the evidence is relevant and substantial to back up the application and prove why they are applying. Additionally, immigration attorneys can help in other ways. They can work with legislatures to help pass policies that will protect immigrants as well as get out to vote against politicians who want to pass more policies similar to this.

Oftentimes, clients come to us after having sent in their applications and mistakes were made or not enough evidence was provided. In the past, USCIS would have sent an RFE on these cases, and we, as the attorneys, could help rectify the situation. Now, USCIS could deny the whole case and potentially place the applicant into deportation for these types of mistakes. Thus, we want to be involved with our clients from the very beginning rather than trying to repair situations that become very timely and costly for all parties. ✨

From Adaptation to Growth:

10 Ways Small C-Stores Can Stay Competitive

In March 2017, Burger King's parent company bought Popeyes. Five months later, Amazon acquired Whole Foods. As more and more retail giants merge, some small business owners are starting to worry. How can their stores possibly compete with these behemoth corporations?

C-STORES ARE NOT IMMUNE TO THESE CONCERNS. A number of midsize c-store chains were bought out in 2017, and some of the bigger players were involved in major transactions as well, including 7-Eleven, which purchased 1,030 of Sunoco's c-stores located in 17 states for approximately \$3.1 billion. But small c-store owners are not alone. In fact, they are still in the majority. According to NACS, 67% of the more than 154,000 c-stores in the United States are run by small operators who oversee one to 10 locations, and 63% are run by single-store operators.

Competing against big chains with stronger name recognition, greater purchasing power, and lower overhead costs isn't easy, but it can be done. Here are 10 ways small c-store owners can ensure their store stays competitive—and thrives.



Competing against big chains with stronger name recognition, greater purchasing power, and lower overhead costs isn't easy, but it can be done.

1

Study the Local Market

Unlike the major chains, you know your local community inside and out. After all, you are a member of the community yourself. You live there; your kids go to school there; you shop there. You know what your community wants and needs, and your store should reflect that knowledge. This can be as simple as adding merchandise in support of the local university or professional sports team or selling walking sticks if your store is located near a popular hiking trail. Take the time to truly get to know your community and identify ways you can better serve it.

2

Adapt Quickly

Small c-store owners have one big advantage over their larger competitors: There's not as much red tape slowing down progress. If you want to make a change, you can make that change immediately. You don't have to wait for permission from a corporate office. Take advantage of this adaptability to move quickly when opportunity arises. You can adjust prices as you see fit, add new merchandise if you find something you think your customers will like, create fun displays to draw your customers' attention, and rearrange aisles to test out a new store layout—it's all up to you.

3

Become an Early Adopter

No one knows exactly what the future holds for the automotive or oil and gas industries. Electric cars have been touted as the next big thing for years, but the general public has been slow to embrace them. Auto industry experts say it will be another 10 years before alternative fuel vehicles, including electric cars, hybrids, and cars powered by ethanol, natural gas, and propane, become mainstream. Nonetheless, it can pay off in the long term if you stay on top of industry news and start preparing now. Some c-stores are already putting

in electric vehicle charging stations, knowing they may sit empty for the time being.

4

Embrace Technology

As technology advances and prices drop, there's no reason not to make life easier for you, your employees, and your customers by incorporating new technology. From self-serve kiosks to mobile apps, these technologies increase efficiency for everyone and often save you money in the long term. They can speed up transactions, prevent miscommunication, and reduce the use of paper by eliminating receipts. As an added benefit, they demonstrate to your customers that you keep up with the latest technological advances and are committed to providing the best retail experience.

5

Be Different

Some might say that one advantage of the large chain c-stores is their consistency: When you walk into one of those stores, you know what to expect. But you can also look at it as a disadvantage and say the stores lack originality and personality. Why not make your store stand out from the crowd? Elevate your business from a store to an experience. Whether this means incorporating a theme, decorating in a lavish style, or providing unusual services (dog wash, anyone?), a store that is innovative and memorable is likely to earn repeat customers.

6

Up Your Foodservice Game

Food sales continue to grow as more and more c-stores invest in their foodservice programs. According to NACS, foodservice accounted for 22.5% of in-store sales in 2017 and 33.9% of gross profit dollars. This is in large part due to a focused effort to offer choices beyond the traditional greasy pizza and lukewarm hot dog. Today's



c-stores are investing in fresh, healthy food options—and customers are responding. In addition to nutritious meals and snacks, don't forget to look into offering ethnic food options that appeal to specific populations in your store's neighborhood.

7

Provide Amenities

While c-stores are still about, well, convenience, customers increasingly are looking for a place to sit and stay for awhile. They're not just rushing in to grab a candy bar; they're coming in to have a healthy meal and relax. Many customers want to stretch their legs during road trips and recharge their smartphones. Be sure you provide an opportunity for them to do both. Invest in attractive seating options, fast (and free!) Wi-Fi, and handy charging stations so your customers get the most out of their stop and hopefully come back soon.

8

Stay on Top of New and Existing Laws

As a small business owner, you probably don't have a legal team updating you on the latest laws and regulations—but you must comply with them nonetheless. It's vital that you understand the laws related to tobacco and alcohol sales, labor and employment matters, and other issues that impact your day-to-day business operations. Look into related educational opportunities as they arise, and take advantage of your GAMA membership. GAMA strives to stay abreast of the legislative develop-

ments and advise members accordingly, so keep an eye out for communications from the GAMA team.

9

Give Back to Your Community

In addition to identifying products and services your community needs, it's important to give back to your community. This can come in many forms. You can donate to local charities or sponsor events such as the Aga Khan Foundation golf or gala events. You can display posters to support causes and recognize your participation. You can host a food drive for the local food bank. You can give your employees paid time off to volunteer at a local nonprofit. However you do it, your community support will be noticed and appreciated by customers. It's a win-win situation: Your community thrives, and your store thrives.

10

Get to Know Your Customers

Sometimes the most obvious solution is the best solution. When it comes to the retail industry, nothing beats good old-fashioned customer service. Make sure your employees are trained on how to provide not just great customer service, but exceptional customer service. Take the time to develop relationships with your customers. You don't have to learn their kids' names or even their own names; you just have to make them feel welcome and valued. Many customers specifically seek out local businesses to support, and you want your store to be on the top of that list. ★



Best Convenience Stores in Austin

airbnb.com/things-to-do/austin/essentials/convenience-store

Bluebonnet Food Mart
1701 Bluebonnet Ln.

Bread Basket Food Store
1514 Holly St.

Barton Food Mart
1500 Spyglass Dr.

Barton Hills Market
1220 Barton Hills Dr.

Live Oak Market
4410 Manchaca Rd.

Pronto Food Mart
4301 Duval St.

Sunrise Mini Mart
915 West Oltorf St.

Riverside Liquor
2023 East Riverside Dr.

First Stop Food Store
1017 Barton Springs Rd.

West Lynn Corner Store
(now Clarksville Market)
1001 West Lynn St.

Hyde Park Market
4429 Duval St.

Sixth Street Cool Store
1900 East 6th St.

Rosedale Market
1309 West 45th St.

Bread Basket
2150 East 7th St.

7-Eleven
1320 East Oltorf St.

Ana's Mart
800 Brazos St.

Delicious
1100 South Lamar Blvd.

Around the Corner Store
2321 West North Loop Blvd.

Favorite Liquor & Wine
801 West 6th St.

Twin Liquors
2932 Guadalupe St.

Riverside Chevron
400 South Congress Ave.

1st Food Mart
1410 South 1st St.

Duval Market
500 East 51st St.

H-E-B Fuel
500 West Canyon Ridge Dr.

Bread Basket
2228 East Cesar Chavez St.

Barton Springs Food Mart
1525 Barton Springs Rd.

Monarch Food Mart
1402 East 38th 1/2 St.

7-Eleven
1705 South Lakeshore Blvd.

Shell
1901 East MLK Blvd

7-Eleven
2103 South Congress Ave.

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Is Your Revenue Falling?

6 Ways to Assess and Address Store Decline

Despite increased competition, c-stores nationwide are experiencing strong sales.

Nearly 75% of c-store owners said their in-store sales increased over the first nine months of 2018 compared to the same time last year, according to a recent survey conducted by NACS. About 87% of owners are about optimistic about their business prospects for the next quarter, and 85% are optimistic about the economy's prospects.

At the same time, 9% of c-store owners said their in-store sales have declined this year.



WHILE IT'S NOT UNCOMMON FOR SALES to ebb and flow, if your c-store is consistently struggling, there may be factors in play other than the cyclical nature of the retail industry. It may be time to take a good, hard look at your store and determine the root cause of your declining sales. Here are six questions to ask yourself to help identify why sales are down at your store—and suggestions for reversing the trend.

1 / Is your store outdated?

When was the last time you redesigned your store? All stores need a facelift at one point or another—even c-stores. Today's customers expect a warm, inviting environment, not stores that are so crammed with merchandise that they can't walk through the aisles or stores that feature harsh fluorescent lighting that makes them feel like they're back in the office. From adding seating to incorporating a splash of color on the walls, improving the look and feel of your c-store can increase foot traffic and ultimately revenue.

Suggestion: Try to step back and look at your store from the perspective of your customers. A consultant can review the current layout of your store with fresh eyes and offer suggestions on how to create a more welcoming atmosphere.


2 / Is your merchandise outdated?

Your taste changes over time. Why wouldn't your customers'? It's important to stay on top of customer behavior and trends, especially when it comes to your foodservice program. While some sweet and salty snacks will always be big sellers, more and more customers are seeking out healthy options when they pop into their neighborhood c-store. Are you offering fresh fruit and vegetables? What about nutritious meals? Don't be afraid to get creative with your food offerings. Abandoning high-calorie, low-quality food for innovative flavors and memorable meals will keep your customers coming back for more.

Suggestion: Visit a few of your competitors' stores and check out their merchandise. Be sure to look at not only what they're selling that you are not, but also what you're selling that they've long removed from their shelves.

3 / Are your prices reasonable?

Price wars are real. As dollar stores begin offering fresh foods and fast-food restaurants place more items on their value menus, c-stores are being forced to analyze their pricing structures. It's not enough to offer quality products. Customers expect that. You also must offer them at an affordable price. It's important to think your



pricing through carefully; a change of just a few cents can have a profound impact—positive or negative—on both sales and profit.

Suggestion: Be strategic about your pricing. Don't just set a price for an item and move on to the next; develop pricing guidelines that include regular and new item pricing as well as promotional pricing.

4 / Are you well-stocked?

It's easy to be tricked by an empty shelf. Your initial reaction may be one of relief, knowing your customers are buying your merchandise. But that's a shortsighted way to look at it. It's great that you've successfully stocked items that your customers want—but if there's nothing on the shelf, there's nothing for your customers to buy. And if your customers can't find what they need when they visit your store, it's unlikely they'll come back.

Suggestion: Invest in back stock for your more popular products so you can ensure your shelves remain stocked. You may have limited room in your store, but it's worth carving out a little space for these quick-moving items.

5 / Are your employees delivering exceptional customer service?

Repeat business is crucial to the success of any c-store, and customers won't come back if they aren't treated well. This is especially important to remember in the era of social media, when one unfortunate moment can be forever immortalized online.

Ultimately, it all comes down to customer service. Whether the customer is there to grab a pack of gum or to fill up the tank of her SUV, you need to make she feels welcomed and satisfied with her experience.

Suggestion: Provide training to your employees on best practices in customer service. The smallest details—eye contact, a friendly greeting, a warm smile—can make the biggest impact. Be sure to include training on how to handle concerns and complaints as well.

6 / How convenient is your convenience store?

In today's fast-paced world, c-stores will always have a major advantage over their competitors in one key aspect: speed. According to NACS, almost half (45%) of all consumers say they are in and out of a c-store with a purchase in 3 minutes or less. They also say c-stores are the fastest location to buy something to eat or drink, besting fast-food restaurants by a 2-to-1 margin. With so many options for their business, customers won't tolerate long lines or a slow checkout process at your store.

Suggestion: Take a look at how quickly transactions are being completed at your store and explore ways to speed them up. From touchscreen food ordering to self-checkout stations, there are a number of ways you can improve the efficiency of your store and the experience of your customers. ★

Industry Update

by STEVE KOEBELE



Let's revisit three topics developing from the hand of government that relate to your business: (1) plastic bag bans; (2) city attempts to increase costs on Austin businesses; and (3) the minimum age to buy tobacco products.

First, in recent years, the City of Austin and other cities have adopted local laws that prohibited businesses from giving customers plastic bags to carry purchases from the store. Governor Greg Abbott said that such local bag ban ordinances are examples of Texas being "California-ized" by "ridiculous, unnecessary" local laws. Abbott said, "Unchecked overregulation by cities will turn the Texas miracle into the California nightmare."

An association of merchants in South Texas sued to stop the city bag ban ordinance by properly arguing that existing state law controls—or "preempts"—local ordinance laws. State law says that local governments (such as a city or county) cannot adopt a local law that would "prohibit or restrict, for solid waste management purposes, the sale or use of a container or package in a manner not authorized by state law." A plastic bag is, of course, a container.

Rather than focusing on filling street potholes or delivering great public works service, the Austin City Council wrongly injected government into the relationship between businesses and their consumers.

The Supreme Court of Texas ruled this past summer that cities cannot pass a local law or otherwise prohibit businesses from giving plastic bags to their customers. After spending significant tax dollars on litigation and losing in court, the Austin City Council passed a resolution in late August saying that city employees are "encouraging retailers and other affected parties to continue to honor the ordinance as they have since 2013, and work to identify opportunities for retailer and community education to continue voluntary reduction of single-use bags." The bottom line: Businesses that want to give plastic bags to customers may do so and would be fully compliant with the laws of Texas.

Second, activist groups are pushing local governments to adopt ordinances that would increase the costs to operate businesses. In Austin, without truly considering input from employers, the individuals that dominate the Austin City Council passed a local law to be effective on October 1 that would require businesses to give all employees in the city eight days of paid "sick" leave per year (basical-





ly, paid time off). Individuals controlling Austin's city government want to move outside the proper role of government and wrongly inject themselves into the private sector economy. Prior to the city council vote, a city councilman made the following illustrative statement as part of the open meeting discussion on the mandatory paid sick leave matter: "The Travis County Democratic Party passed a unanimous resolution in support, but this last week the Texas Democratic Party, so the statewide organization, have signed on in support of this ordinance. Their statewide platform is a minimum of seven paid sick days for all workers in the state so this lines up pretty well with that, as well as local democratic clubs, the Progressive Democrats of Central Texas, that chapter. The Austin Democrats posted last night as well as the Liberal Democrats of Austin ordinance that we have right here."

Businesses that would be harmed by Austin's action filed a lawsuit, and an appellate court has temporarily blocked the ordinance from going into effect on October 1. Also, the attorney general of Texas has also entered the litigation in support of the employers

and against the City of Austin. Separately, employers and other stakeholders asked for help from state legislators. More than 20 statewide associations, including the National Federation of Independent Business, will support state legislation next year that will seek to overturn the city ordinance.

Third, activist groups have attempted in prior years to pass state-level legislation that would increase the age requirement to purchase tobacco from 18 to 21 years of age. Using a different level of government, as of October 1, San Antonio made it illegal to sell tobacco or vapor products in that city to anyone under the age of 21. The Austin City Council is considering the same action. To stop this local activism, the Texas Legislature will deliberate overturning such local laws.

The GAMA Board of Directors and professional staff are committed to diligently working to enhance your c-store business interests. As always, GAMA will closely monitor new laws, policies, and other matters that are important to you. ★

Steve Koebele is a principal lobbyist at Texas Counsel and provides public policy representation, counseling, and advocacy for a diverse range of clients composed of market leaders in their respective industries.

What's HOT What's NOT



1 / The Charge of the Future

In a recent episode of Convenience Matters, “Electrify Gas Stations of the Future,” Jeff Lenard, NACS vice president of strategic industry initiatives, and Donovan Woods, director of operations for the Fuels Institute, talked with Rachel Moses, Electrify America’s senior manager site acquisition for development and strategy, about America’s electric vehicle future.

Electrify America will be investing \$2 billion into building a national network that will enable electric vehicles to traverse the country. The organization is looking for “purposed-placed infrastructure” in places where people want to spend time. “We’re looking at highly trafficked areas across the country . . . [with no more] than 120 miles between sites, with an average distance of around 70 miles,” Moses said. She pointed out that the charging technology that will be put in will have a higher charging speed (0% to 100% within 15 minutes), yet still service older EV models as well.

Source: NACS | www.nacsonline.com

2 / Hurricane May Drive Higher Freight Costs

The impact of Hurricane Florence on the mid-Atlantic region could force freight costs to rise again, which could be a problem for several food companies, according to a report published in Food Business News.

Pending natural disasters tend to provide a net positive to processed food companies because consumers stock up on necessities, according to a report from Credit Suisse; however, distribution costs tend to jump as food processors scramble to get truck drivers to show up at their facilities.

“We will have a better sense in the next couple of weeks whether Florence causes spot prices for freight to spike and whether it will shape contract rates for next year,” Robert Moskow, research analyst with Credit Suisse, wrote in the report.

Source: NACS | nacsonline.com



3 / Prime Deli Recalls 7-Eleven Salads

Prime Deli Corp. has issued a recall of more than 200 pounds of ready-to-eat salads made for 7-Eleven due to potential risk of salmonella and listeria, Food Safety News reports. The salads, produced on October 13, have a “best by” date of October 16 and were distributed only to 7-Eleven Texas locations.

A company that provides ingredients to Prime Deli said that it had listeria monocytogenes and salmonella “concerns” about the corn used in the salads. Each of the recalled salads will have the establishment number “EST. 13553” printed inside the

USDA mark of inspection on their labels. See https://www.convenience.org/Media/Daily/2018/Oct/19/6-Prime-Deli-Recalls-7-Eleven-Salads_Foodservice for more information.

Source: NACS | nacsonline.com

4 / Giving Back Boosts the Bottom Line

Activism can mean a healthy bottom line these days, as consumers like to support businesses that in turn support causes they care about. A recent survey by Cox Business discovered that 71% of respondents would buy more at a small business that supported a positive or environmental social cause. Businesses that participate in particular causes can recruit better workers and have a positive impact on employee morale. Ways to show support of a good cause include allowing employees time off for volunteer or pro bono work, matching worker donations, or participating in fundraising. Last year, nearly half of all business owners said they give to local charities or offer community service in their neighborhoods.

Source: NACS | www.nacsonline.com

5 / Can Kombucha Go to Mass Market?

It's clear that kombucha is having a moment. Coca-Cola Co. and PepsiCo Inc. have diversified their portfolios to include kombucha—and are continuing to invest. In 2018, sales are up 43% over all of 2017 and on course to break \$1 billion for the first time, according to Bloomberg.

"Consumers are going toward beverages that are organic and natural—which is where kombucha came from," Tom Vierhile, innovation insights director at Global Data, told Bloomberg. It's the probiotic piece that hits home. Nearly 65% of American consumers believe probiotics are good for you, typically contributing to improved digestive health and gut bacteria.

According to NACS Vice President of Industry Initiatives Jeff Lenard, 53% of shoppers go to convenience stores to satisfy their thirst, and all



kombucha "needs is a few people saying it's cool" on social media to break into this market. 7-Eleven Inc. has been testing a kombucha brand in 350 U.S. locations, Lenard said, and sales are strongest in Southern California and Oregon. The biggest question seems to be whether kombucha will gain more mainstream fans and stay in vogue. "Nonalcoholic beverages are like the fashion industry," Vierhile told Bloomberg. "Stuff comes into favor, then falls out of favor—it's very accommodating to entrepreneurs who have hustle."

Source: NACS | nacsonline.com

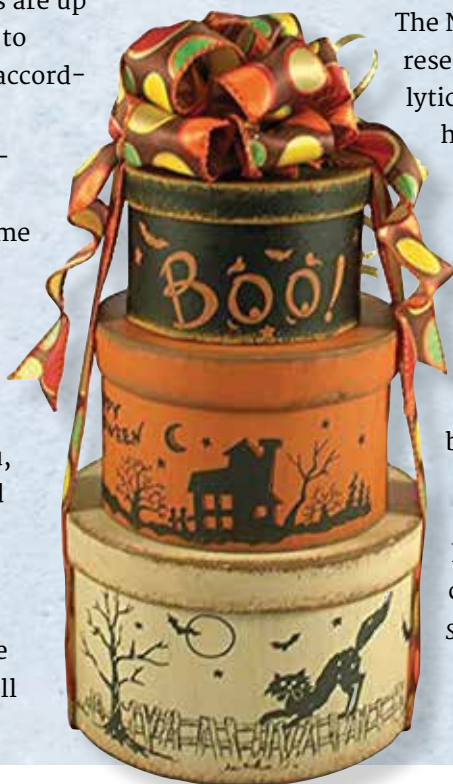
6 / Halloween Spending to Hit \$9 Billion This Year

Retailers are in for a treat this Halloween. The National Retail Federation expects revelers to spend \$9 billion on costumes, candy, and décor.

The National Retail Federation and the research firm Prosper Insights & Analytics surveyed consumers about their holiday purchases. They estimate that more than 175 million Americans will partake in Halloween festivities this year and anticipate increased sales across all related purchasing categories.

"Expect consumers to be on the lookout for early-bird promotions, both online and in-store, as they hunt for the best items to complete their costumes and embellish their homes," said Pam Goodfellow, principal analyst with Prosper Insights.

Source: NACS | nacsonline.com





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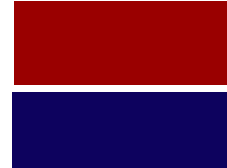
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