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CSP Exclusive

Foodservice Know-How

Burcher brings expertise to new consultancy

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OAKVILLE, Ont. -- Going back to his days of helping Wawa develop its foodservice program to his work with Petro-Canada and its Neighbours convenience store concept, Ed Burcher sees vast potential for foodservice within the channel. Now that his tenure at the Mississauga, Ont.-based Petro-Canada is drawing to a close, he spoke with *CSP Daily News* about how foodservice at c-stores is evolving and where the opportunities lie.

Having just started Burcher Consulting, Oakville, Ont., the 34-year industry veteran said foodservice at c-stores is all about creating differentiation. "It's about first being honest with yourself about what you can do," he said. "But everybody has that ability to be unique and develop a point of difference."



Ed Burcher

Burcher hopes that by starting his own consultancy, he can further his industry knowledge and help small- to mid-sized chains benefit from what he has learned.

He began his career in c-stores in 1979 working part-time for Wawa Inc., Wawa, Pa., taking on a full-time position after graduating college. He spent 18 years at Wawa, helping develop food programs that extended beyond the chain's well-known hoagie sandwich offer. Then moving on to Petro-Canada, Burcher was in charge of its Neighbours c-store concept, creating a more upscale offer that had a strong foodservice presence during his 16-year tenure with that chain.

(See File Attachments below to read the CSP magazine feature "Meet the Neighbours.")

Burcher characterized many of the lessons he's accumulated to be as much about what not to do as what to actually do. A case in point was Wawa's move away from branded quick-serve restaurant (QSR) solutions. During his tenure, he helped the chain build its programs with popular taco and pizza franchises. While those were successful businesses, Wawa came to believe that its foodservice programs needed to go forward with the Wawa brand.

What he did learn during that timeframe was to benchmark food offers not against other c-stores, but against competing QSRs. "Quick serve and casual [restaurants] were our gold standards," he said. "I had to have something as good as McDonald's from a product quality [perspective]."

That said, smaller operators can be competitive. "A smaller chain has more control over what they do," he said. "We're not [always] talking about money. We've all seen hole-in-the-wall diners that have a huge following. It could be quality, quantity or a unique experience."

Creating that differentiation is key. "If you're not willing to create a point of difference, you become a commodity," he said. "If you're just a commodity competing on price, it's a downward spiral."

He spoke of a chain he knew that struggled initially, trying to copy what a successful competitor was doing. The turnaround came in establishing something unique in the market, Burcher said.

Potential for foodservice success is still strong, especially in the breakfast and lunch day parts, he said. Traffic at c-stores for those time periods make foodservice a "no brainer," especially with breakfast. He said a lot of opportunity exists with breakfast, especially for those retailers who have elevated their coffee programs.

For those just getting into foodservice, "I would suggest building breakfast and then lunch, or if you're doing a total [remodel], then go big with both breakfast and lunch," he said. "Again, it's what does your business look like and what are you able to do?"

Source: [CSP Daily News](#)

Retailer Focus: [Wawa Inc.](#)

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File Attachments

- [Meet_the_Neighbours](#) (PDF)