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## PDQ Display Cases – Five Feet, Five Seconds

As a warehouse club supplier, when it comes to your product's package, design and message, your goal is simple: within approximately five feet of your item and within approximately five seconds of seeing your SKU, a member, who does not have your product on his shopping list, should be "drawn" to your item in some way. Otherwise, you've likely lost an opportunity for a sale which, if that situation is repeatedly duplicated, you've put your item's long term success with that club buyer in jeopardy.

When planning and deciding how your company wants your club item to look when it is merchandised in a location, the PDQ (pretty darn quick) display case must be treated with the same attention and forethought that is used with the item's primary package. As with a club SKU's primary package, your company should have a goal of what the PDQ needs to accomplish.

Jim Holdsworth, technical packaging specialist at Weber Display & Packaging ([jholdsworth@weberdisplay-pkg.com](mailto:jholdsworth@weberdisplay-pkg.com)), said, "The actual function of the PDQ is misunderstood by many unfamiliar with the club sales environment and associated supply chain. In many cases, the PDQ is viewed as a necessary evil, even an afterthought. A poorly designed or functioning PDQ can result in lost sales and unanticipated and/or unrecoverable costs."

The following article provides a wide range of concepts that existing warehouse club items use for their PDQ design and message. The list is extensive and should provide ideas and guidelines that can help your company determine what your PDQ design and message will be. Please note, the concepts do not appear in order of importance.

**Durability – Supply Chain** – The PDQ needs to withstand the rigors of the entire supply chain. It is not good enough for the product, the PDQ and the full pallet display to look good in a production facility. The product and the PDQ must look the same in the club location. The PDQ is the key part of the pallet display and suppliers need to understand the supply chain issues the product and the PDQ will face and be designed appropriately (double stacking a heavier product on top and unloading by layer with a clamp truck, for example).

Sam's stocked two 1.5-liter bottles of Listerine cool mint mouthwash for \$11.87. As can be seen from the picture on the right, the PDQ is reinforced with horizontal tabs along both sides and the back. These tabs provide additional stacking support for the PDQ itself as the mouthwash is a heavier SKU and provide additional stacking space and support vertically.



**Durability – In Club** – The PDQ needs to structurally perform in the club location until all the product is sold. This may mean club employees hand stack the PDQ in a different way than what was intended by the engineers.

Doug Farrell, director of sales at U.S. Merchants ([doug.f@u-s-merchants.com](mailto:doug.f@u-s-merchants.com)), said, "As a pallet sells down and PDQ trays are removed by club members, suppliers should consider how well remaining PDQs will hold up as a 'stand alone' display or in combination with other products as club merchandisers will add residual PDQ inventory to other pallets of inventory to make room for a new pallet."

Holdsworth said, "There are actually three club customers for your PDQ. The club member's needs come first followed by the club buyer's opinions. However, club merchandisers have a big voice. The goal for them is zero maintenance. If that is not possible due to poor product presentation due to a failing PDQ, their complaints may be relayed to the buyer."

**Durability – Take Home** – A durable PDQ will receive one last marketing advantage. After members pay for their purchases, the PDQ may be selected and gain additional visibility as a member will use it to carry their products out of the club location, into their car and finally, into their home or business.

**Brand, Theme** – There are products that are easily recognized by consumers due to a brand and/or theme that has been marketed over time. For these types of products, emphasizing those aspects that will resonate with club consumers is a strategy that some suppliers will follow.

MARS, Incorporated uses colors to differentiate its M&M products. For example, it uses brown for M&M plain chocolate candy and yellow for M&M chocolate peanut candy. For consumers who like and eat chocolate, the association between the color and the respective M&M product is tangible.



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Sam's stocked a 62-ounce container of M&M chocolate peanut candy for \$12.98 (see picture on the right). As can be seen in the picture, the package and PDQ rely heavily on yellow and the pallet display creates a billboard for MARS and M&M. As the member walks the candy aisle, before they approach the pallet, the member likely realizes the display is for M&M chocolate peanut candy because of the yellow color association.

**Member Need** – A club supplier should pose several questions to determine how to address a member need through the PDQ. First, a supplier needs to decide whether the product in question is targeting the consumer or business member. If it's the wholesale member, questions should follow that identify the business type and then narrow down to the key needs of that group.



Costco—Finish Jet Dry

For consumers, there can be different member needs that the product in question addresses. Ranking those needs may be one way to understand whether this concept should be focused on in PDQ design and messaging. If those key needs (for either business or consumer members) are strong enough and resonate with members, focusing on them may help attract their attention.

A good example is the 32-ounce bottle of Jet Dry ultra dishwasher rinse aid from Finish for \$10.99 at Costco (see picture above). This product's two core benefits are: it helps dry dishes and it helps eliminate spots. As can be seen from the picture, the PDQ clearly states those two points.

**Pallet Facing** – Typically, in the aisles, Costco merchandises product facing the 48-inch (long) side of the pallet while BJ's and Sam's merchandise product facing the 40-inch (short) side of the pallet. This strategy difference enables BJ's and Sam's, who stock more items than Costco, to merchandise three SKUs in a merchandising bay compared to Costco which merchandises two items in a merchandising bay.

Club vendors should make sure their pallet is engineered so it can be effectively seen, accessed and merchandised from both the 40-inch side and the 48-inch side. When designing the PDQ, suppliers should include their design and message on all four sides. Farrell said, "Regarding BJ's and Sam's Club, consideration must also be made regarding whether the pallet is merchandised within an aisle or on an end cap. If it is on an end cap, the pallet may require a specific PDQ placement strategy with respect to shopping side orientation. This is why BJ's and Sam's Club prefer the three-side facing pallet display at a minimum."

Sam's stocked a 210-ounce bottle of Lysol all purpose cleaner for \$8.98. As can be seen from the picture on the right, the pallet is merchandised on the 40-inch side and shows both the product and the two side views (one with a primary color of blue and one with a primary color of yellow). The pallet offers the same view from the 48-inch side.



Sam's—Lysol

**Clear, Concise** – As a member's head and eyes pass over your product as they walk an aisle, the product and the PDQ have just several seconds to resonate. Providing too much information can be confusing for that member and cause them to continue on their shopping trip. Sometimes, providing clear and concise information is a good alternative.

Sam's stocked a package of three 17.5-ounce cans of Raid wasp and hornet spray for \$11.98. As can be seen from the picture on the left, the PDQ primary color is yellow which pulls from the secondary color on the can. In a simple, clear and concise way, the PDQ reiterates the brand, what the product does and how many cans are in the package.



Sam's—Raid Wasp, Hornet Spray

**Expiration Date** – One of the challenges the clubs have in not only managing perishable categories but some dry grocery items is product rotation. Vendors who supply perishable categories and products or are concerned that their item needs to be properly rotated, should provide clear expiration date information on the PDQ. Making it highly visible for the clubs will enable them to more effectively rotate product avoiding product loss. Additionally, club members, for those certain items, will also want to know the product's expiration date.

Sam's stocked a case of fifteen 14-count packs of Trident tropical twist gum for \$9.88. As can be seen from the picture on the right, the product's expiration date is clearly printed on the bottom left of the PDQ.



Sam's—Trident Gum



Costco—Dittman Truffle



Costco—Dittman Truffle

**Inventory Control** – One of the unique aspects of club pallet displays is the ability to manage the total number of products available for purchase. While this strategy is more common in general merchandise, it still occurs in food.

The club buyer or supplier may want to modify the display tray that holds the clamshell, blister or corrugated-backed package so the amount of inventory dollars better matches what the club buyer and supplier expect the item to generate in sales. At the same time, despite the inventory being managed, when looking at the front of the pallet display, the club member still views a full pallet of merchandise.

Costco stocked a 6.35-ounce bottle of Dittman black truffle carpaccio for \$23.49. As can be seen from the picture on the top left, the PDQ is designed to show two SKUs when looking at the front. However, when looking at the PDQ from the side (see picture on the bottom left), the PDQ is designed to only hold four items per row or eight bottles in total.

Farrell discussed PDQ durability when clamshell, blister or corrugated-backed packaging is used. Farrell said, “With respect to the PDQ that is used for blister cards, it is important that package engineering is employed to determine stacking strength as adjustments may be needed to the height or board strength of the PDQ.”

**Large Print** – Sometimes, a supplier will just want to convey a simple message to members. This may or may not address a member need but is an important point that the vendor wants the member to know. Sam’s stocked a one-gallon bottle of commercial dish soap from Dawn with a pump. As can be seen from the picture on the right, the message that Dawn is the “#1 Dish Brand for Pros” is printed in a large font size and the primary message conveyed to the member on the PDQ.



Sam's—Dawn Detergent

**Physical Design** – There are many club items that can be difficult to merchandise using a PDQ. Additional engineering and design work will need to occur if a supplier intends to sell one of those oddly shaped products to BJ's, Costco, Cost-U-Less, PriceSmart and Sam's Club.

Costco stocked a Nordic Ware bundt pan for \$19.99. As can be seen from the picture on the right, each pan is safely and securely nestled in its own space within the PDQ so that it does not touch the other pans and the wide open space in the front enables members to easily see the product.



Weber—Cadet Bull Sticks



Costco—Nordic Ware Bundt Pan

Another example of a physical design can be seen from the picture on the left of the Cadet Bull Stick pallet and PDQ. The product within the PDQ can be accessed from any side. Holdsworth said, “If a club member ends up stopping and evaluating a purchase decision but has difficulty accessing or removing the product, a lost sale may occur. That will not happen with the Cadet Bull Stick. The PDQ was designed so the product is easily accessible from all four sides, no matter how the pallet is positioned on the sales floor.”

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**Private Label** – The private label programs at each club are important. BJ's private label program represents approximately 13% of its total SKUs and approximately 23% of its total merchandise sales. Costco's private label program represents approximately 16% of its total items and approximately 25% of its total merchandise sales. Sam's private label program represents approximately 18% of its total products and approximately 25% of its total merchandise sales.

Following what each club does with its PDQ can provide insights into important design and message concepts that should be considered. Sam's stocked a 48-ounce container of Member's Mark private label non-gmo infant formula for \$20.98.



As can be seen from the picture on the right, there are two primary concepts Sam's focused on: the annual savings a member receives when purchasing this private label product instead of the national brand and the statement that this item has been improved and is "now closer to breast milk".

**QR Codes** – Including QR Codes on the PDQ is a great way to provide members with additional information about the product. Costco stocked an 80-ounce bag of One Degree organic rolled oats for \$7.59. As can be seen from the picture on the right, the left panel includes a QR Code enabling the member to learn more about the product by watching a video about the ingredients.



**Item Information** – The PDQ message will change based on the product and its features and whether the supplier determines if that information will be included as background, emphasized or excluded. Sam's stocked a pallet display of Eddie Bauer fur lined women's rain boots for \$19.98. Each PDQ included one rain boot size which was clearly displayed on the upper right panel.

Sam's stocked a variety package of nine 1.25-ounce bags of Jack Link's beef jerky (three each of peppered, jalapeno and sweet hot) for \$14.98. The front panel of the PDQ stated the SKU included nine bags and listed, along with their respective color scheme, the three flavors and the fact that there were three bags of each.

Sam's stocked a 500-count box of #10 size press and seal white security envelopes from Member's Mark for \$10.98. As can be seen from the picture on the right, the front panel of the PDQ shows the number of envelopes in the box and the size.



Costco stocked a new item that members might not have been familiar. The product was a package of two 16-ounce bags of Magnifico square wafer cubes (one each of vanilla and hazelnut) from Matilde Vicenzi for \$7.39. To help members understand what the product looked like, the front panel of the PDQ included a picture of both types of square wafer cubes.

Costco stocked a 16-ounce bag of Inno Foods organic dark chocolate keto nuggets. The front panel of the PDQ included two visible logos: the one representing organic merchandise and the one representing an item is non-gmo.

**Product Visual** – Creating a visual design can be an effective tool to attract a member's eye as they walk an aisle. Sam's stocked case of twenty-five 1.76-ounce packs of belVita cinnamon and brown sugar breakfast biscuits for \$10.87. As can be seen from the picture on the left, the product package includes a large image of the breakfast biscuit that goes below the lip of the PDQ. Instead of "cutting" that image at the PDQ lip, the rest of the image is included on the front panel of the PDQ.



Club members understand and recognize most club items will have PDQ display cases that can disrupt or block the entire product package, message or design. Seeing the full image of the biscuit and trying to figure out how that appears despite the existence of the PDQ may make a member stop and look at the item for several seconds.

**Treasure Hunt** – The clubs constantly rotate high-end or unique merchandise into their locations. This creates a "treasure hunt" atmosphere in the buildings, as nonessential or "impulse" products are constantly changing and a "buy it now" attitude among members is created as they recognize that those products may not be in stock the next time they shop in their local club. Treasure hunt items are purchased on advantageous terms that allow the clubs to pass on substantial savings to their members.



In some cases, warehouse club members may learn to recognize whether an item is a “treasure hunt” product. However, conveying that the item is a “treasure hunt” SKU in some way can benefit a supplier. Sam’s stocked a Revlon one-step volume and frizz control hair brush for \$44.98.

As can be seen from the picture on the left, the front panel of the PDQ stated the item is going to be stocked for a “limited time only”. This simple statement can translate into sales as members would recognize the product likely won’t be stocked the next time they shop at Sam’s Club.

## FINANCIAL

### Costco Wholesale

#### Costco Reports Fourth Quarter and Fiscal Year Results

*Globe Newswire – September 23, 2021*

Costco reported financial results for its fourth quarter and fiscal year ending August 29, 2021 via a press release and conference call with financial analysts. The following is a summary of that information:

**Sales and Earnings – Fourth Quarter** – Costco reported fourth quarter merchandise sales increased 17.5% from \$52.28 billion last year to \$61.44 billion this year. Membership revenues increased 11.6% from \$1.11 billion last year to \$1.23 billion this year and overall revenues increased 17.4% from \$53.38 billion last year to \$62.68 billion this year. Operating income increased 17.9% from \$1.93 billion last year to \$2.28 billion this year and net income increased 20.2% from \$1.39 billion last year to \$1.67 billion this year.

**Sales and Earnings – Fiscal Year** – Costco reported fiscal year merchandise sales increased 17.7% from \$163.22 billion last year to \$192.05 billion this year. Membership revenues increased 9.5% from \$3.54 billion last year to \$3.88 billion this year and overall revenues increased 17.5% from \$166.76 billion last year to \$195.93 billion this year. Costco’s 17.5% overall revenue increase is the company’s strongest result since fiscal 2001 when overall revenues increased 21.4%.

Costco’s 23.4% operating income increase from \$5.44 billion last year to \$6.71 billion this year is the company’s strongest result since fiscal 1998 when operating income increased 35.5%. Net income increased 25.1% from \$4.00 billion last year to \$5.01 billion this year.

**Merchandise Gross Margins – Fourth Quarter** – Costco reported fourth quarter merchandise gross margins decreased 32 basis points from 11.24% last year to 10.92% this year. Core merchandise gross margins decreased 40 basis points with non-foods slightly higher, foods and sundries slightly lower and fresh foods lower.

**Merchandise Gross Margins – Fiscal Year** – Costco reported fiscal year merchandise gross margins decreased eight basis points from 11.20% last year to 11.12% this year.

**Comparable Sales – Fourth Quarter** – Costco reported fourth quarter comparable sales increased 15.5% with United States locations increasing 14.9%, Canadian locations increasing 19.5% and other international locations increasing 15.0%. Excluding gasoline and foreign currency exchange (gas/fx), Costco reported fourth quarter comparable sales increased 9.4% with United States locations increasing 10.3%, Canadian locations increasing 6.7% and other international locations increasing 7.3%.

Costco reported average member traffic increased 6.3% worldwide and 6.1% nationally. On a worldwide basis, Costco’s average transaction increased 9.2% including gas/fx and increased 3.1% excluding gas/fx. Nationally, Costco’s average transaction increased 8.8% including gas/fx and increased 4.2% excluding gas/fx.

**Comparable Sales – Fiscal Year** – Costco reported fiscal year comparable sales increased 16.0% (this was Costco’s strongest fiscal year increase since it reported 16.0% comparable sales growth in fiscal 1998) with United States locations increasing 14.8%, Canadian locations increasing 20.0% and other international locations increasing 19.1%. Excluding gasoline and foreign currency exchange (gas/fx), Costco reported fiscal year comparable sales increased 13.4%, United States locations increased 13.6%, Canadian locations increased 12.1% and other international locations increased 13.4%.

**Locations** – Costco ended its fiscal year with 817 worldwide locations including: 561 in the United States, 105 in Canada, 39 in Mexico, 30 in Japan, 29 in the United Kingdom, 16 in Korea, 14 in Taiwan, 13 in Australia, four in Puerto Rico, three in Spain and one each in Iceland, France and China.

**Expansion** – Costco opened 22 locations in its 2021 fiscal year including two relocations. Costco is planning to open 30 locations in its 2022 fiscal year including five relocations. During fiscal 2022, Costco will open its second location in China and France and its first location in New Zealand.

**Renewal Rates** – Costco reported fourth quarter renewal rates in the United States and Canada were 91.3% compared to 91.0% at the end of its 2020 fourth quarter and 90.9% at the end of its 2019 fourth quarter. Costco reported fourth quarter worldwide renewal rates were 88.7% compared to 88.4% at the end of its 2019 and 2020 fourth quarters. Renewal rates are benefitting from a higher percentage of members selecting the auto-renew option and a higher percentage of member's converting to its premium executive membership program.

**Worldwide Members** – In terms of worldwide paid members, Costco ended its fiscal year with 61.7 million paid business and consumer members compared to 58.1 million at the end of its 2020 fiscal year and 53.9 million at the end of its 2019 fiscal year.

In terms of worldwide cardholders (including free spouse cards), Costco ended its fiscal year with 111.6 million cardholders compared to 105.5 million at the end of its 2020 fiscal year and 98.5 million at the end of its 2019 fiscal year. In terms of executive members, Costco ended its fiscal year with 25.6 million executive members compared to 22.6 million at the end of its 2020 fiscal year and 20.8 million at the end of its 2019 fiscal year.

**Online** – Fourth quarter comparable online sales increased 11.2%. Online sales were strong in jewelry, home furnishings, pharmacy and sporting goods. Fiscal year comparable online sales increased 44.4%.

**Costco Logistics** – For its fourth quarter, Costco Logistics' sales nationally increased 130% compared to last year and represented 24% of United States online sales. Costco averages between 7,000 to 10,000 daily deliveries via Costco Logistics.

**Mobile Application** – Costco is testing digital payments using the Costco credit card in several locations. It is planning to roll this feature out nationally in October. In October, Costco will add the ability to view receipts online. Additionally, its mobile application will have a new landing page by the end of October.

**Shipping** – Due to supply chain challenges, Costco chartered three ocean vessels for next year. These ships will transport merchandise from Asia to the United States and Canada. Costco leased several thousand containers for these ships. Each ship can carry between 800 and 1,000 containers and can make approximately 10 rounds trips over the course of 12 months. Deliveries from these three ships over the course of a year will represent approximately 20% of Costco's Asian shipments to the United States and Canada.

**Curbside Pickup** – Costco's test of curbside pickup at three locations in New Mexico was suspended.

**Data Analytics** – In March, 2020, Costco hired a vice president of data analytics. This person will not be using data analytics to determine product pricing. Costco buyers will continue to determine item pricing. The data analytics team is focusing on providing better tools to help purchase and distribute merchandise as well as project sales.

## CLUB NEWS

### Sam's Club

#### Sam's Opens its Largest Club In Shanghai, China

*Globaltimes.cn* – September 26, 2021

Sam's Club recently opened its largest location in the world in Shanghai, China. It is Sam's 34<sup>th</sup> location in the country. The club is in the Shanghai Pilot Free Trade Zone. The location is part of a 753,000 square foot retail, shopping and entertainment complex. As with other Sam's Club locations in China, members will be able to order online and receive delivery within an hour. By the end of 2022, Sam's Club China expects to have 40 to 45 locations in total, either opened or under construction.

## Costco Wholesale

### Costco's Kirkland Signature Nut Program

*Costco Connection* – September, 2021

Costco's Kirkland Signature private label nut program includes 13 SKUs: unsalted mixed nuts, whole almonds, dry roasted almonds, pistachios, shelled pistachios, dry roasted macadamia nuts, mixed nuts, roasted cashews, trail mix, pecan halves, walnuts, variety snacking nuts and unsalted cashews.

To supply these SKUs, Costco has suppliers from up to 22 countries. Martin Beam, Costco's Canadian corporate foods buyer, said, "We have such outrageously high volume of sales on nuts, we need to have multiple locations that we can draw from at any given time. We are not pulling from all of these locations at the same time, but we have the capability to pull from these locations to maintain supply levels."

Part of the evaluation process for potential suppliers and control of existing suppliers is social audits. Beam said, "They have to abide by social audits and the law as far as being allowed to use child labor or forced labor." These unannounced audits include whether suppliers pay comparable wages.

Once a supplier is selected, Costco works hard to ensure they succeed. Beam said, "The biggest way I would say by far is the education that we can provide, which is a thing that we'll do with literally any facility. We can point out ideas that we've seen elsewhere at other farms that they can do in a location to try to improve things. We can share that kind of knowledge."

Costco will also, if needed, invest in schools and medical care in the communities where its suppliers are located. Beam said, "It's really a win win, because if we can improve the local standard of living in these communities, then we can also ensure an ongoing supply."

To ensure product quality, Costco's quality control laboratories in the United States and Canada are constantly testing product to make sure it meets the company's standards. Beam said, "Auditors just pull product directly from the selling floor and test it against our specs to make sure it meets all the requirements."

## OBSERVATIONS

**WCF's business is the warehouse club industry. To that end, WCF is constantly accumulating information about the industry via phone conversations, warehouse visits, industry publications and manufacturer meetings. This section is WCF's attempt to disseminate that information to the club industry in an ethical and protective manner.**

- According to a September 1, 2020 report from *Moomoo.com*, Sam's Club China is testing an unmanned delivery service in Beijing. The delivery range is between three to five square kilometers. The unmanned vehicles were developed by Dada Express and JD Logistics and there are two vehicles in operation. Each vehicle has eight cargo compartments that are large enough for Sam's Club merchandise. A Dada Express delivery person meets the vehicle at the destination and physically delivers the order.
- According to a September 15, 2021 report from *Hometownlife.com*, BJ's is planning to open a new location in Canton, Michigan in a former J.C. Penney location. The plans calls for BJ's to occupy the former location. The proposed location has a Sam's Club and two Costco locations within a ten mile radius.
- According to a September 14, 2021 press release, Sam's is sponsoring/supporting ten college student athletes through the name, image and likeness (NIL) program that the NCAA recently adopted. Sam's is offering \$10,000 each to ten student athletes who participate primarily in under-represented sports. Additionally, each student athlete must use the Sam name. Megan Crozier, chief merchant at Sam's Club, said, "College athletics is a natural fit for Sam's Club, which offers game day essentials, no matter the sport ... Supporting these athletes gives us a chance to connect with members in a new way, support students and rally behind many under represented collegiate sports. It's a win win."
- According to a September 2, 2021 report from *American Banker*, Capital One did not renew its private label credit card agreement with Costco Canada. CIBC is acquiring the portfolio for \$2.4 billion. Laura Dottori-Attanasio, group head of personal and business banking at CIBC, said, "We are excited to partner with Costco, one of the best and most recognizable brands in Canada for providing unparalleled value, to enhance the rewards program and deliver even more value to their members. This relationship enables us to diversify our credit card portfolio in everyday rewards, grow our market share in payments, and provides a meaningful opportunity to deepen relationships by meeting the financial needs of Costco members."