

Portable Resource Carts Permanent Profit



Location, location, location. That's a real estate sales mantra that transfers easily into the concessions industry. In an environment where the sales window is short and the crowd is varied from day to day, carts and portables can provide you with the means to meet the changing concessions needs of your customer.

Portable carts have been around for a while, but the demand for these concessions on wheels has never been stronger. With increased demands to raise per capita and customer preferences for larger menus, carts and portables are a cost-effective solution.

Mobile concession units are popping up everywhere, featuring all types of menu items. In fact, a group of portables together can form a defacto food court.

Versatile Resources

Perhaps the most important feature of concession carts and portables are their flexibility. Not only can they be moved from place to place, but also can often be modified to support changing menus.

"With the addition of portable food and beverage carts, you can get to areas in the facility that are more convenient to the consumer," states Mark Mansfield of Corsair Display Systems, Canadaigua, NY. Corsair designs and manufactures carts and kiosks for major stadiums, arenas, amusement parks, and other facilities.

And convenience is the backbone of the concessions sale. With a usual sales window of only a few minutes, convenience can make the difference between making a sale and losing it. Carts and por-

by Susan Cross

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tables can bring the concession stand, or at least part of it, to the customer, providing the chance for an impulse sale or winning back a lost sale due to time constraints or long lines. Carts can often be set up in areas that would be too small for a normal concession stand, or even bring the food directly to the customer, much as a hawker in a stadium does.

“Using portables is primarily business-driven,” states Wally Helton, CCM, vice president concession operations for United Artists Theatre Circuit, Englewood, Colo. “If we know it will be busy, we’ll pull out carts and take them up and down the theatre aisles, or put a cart in front and have order-takers come to the seats. In those cases we generally sell one size of popcorn, one size soft drink, and a couple of candies.”

The portability of these units means that they can be moved not only for specific events, but within the event itself. Traffic patterns, weather, the quality of the event, and other factors can affect concession sales. A quick-thinking concessions crew with portable units can capitalize on changing dynamics at a moment’s notice.

Portables can also bring sales to places where there would normally be none. On warm summer days, or in warm weather locations, United Artists has found that sales can be made even before the

customer enters the theatre. “We will take a cart outside to sell beverages, like the Coke contour bottles, to those standing in line. Selling beverages outside has been the most profitable way we’ve used portables.”

The ability to choose locations for portables provides opportunities in high-traffic areas. Chris Chamberlin, director of guest services for Zoo New England in Boston, Mass., explains that they place carts near exhibit openings or special events in the park, and often move them around throughout the day to adjust to traffic patterns.

Beverages and ice cream are particular favorites at the zoo, but Chamberlin notes, “bottled water is our highest selling item out of portables. On a warm day, everyone wants something to drink.”

Professional Concessions Inc. (PCI), a regional concessionaire in West Palm Beach, Fla., uses carts at such diverse venues as amphitheatres, auto racing, stadiums, horse shows and street festivals. Bruce Beck, PCI vice president, notes that portability is the key to using carts effectively. “You can move carts into customer traffic, areas where there are no permanent stands. Our alcoholic beverage carts can be placed close enough to concert stages so that customers can get a drink without missing any of the show.”

The Amenities

Once utilitarian, carts, kiosks and portable units can now be designed with any theme or product in mind. Interestingly, many venues are moving away from standard national branding and toward a more unified, venue-specific look.

“There’s been a definite shift,” notes Corsair’s Mansfield. “The venues are making brands conform to a specific venue theme. They are now looking for a much more uniform, upscale look.” For example, the carts at the Houston Astros’ Enron Field all have a train theme.

According to Mansfield, branded items are still an important part of the food service plan for portables in many facilities, but the branding aspect is diminishing as the demand grows for uniform carts that are venue-specific. “The brand is still there, only they are conforming to the design of the facility, so there isn’t such a clash of different styles.”

This is a partial version of the complete story that appeared in the Spring 2001 issue of Concession Profession, the magazine for NAC members. To become a member of NAC [click here](#).

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