

It's always Eight O'Clock at Big Apple Food Stores

“The difference Eight O'Clock has made in each of our stores is like night and day—from selling a few pounds of coffee per week to 50 and 60 pounds per week.”

Coffee is a pretty hot commodity in chilly New England, but until 1995, a lack of consistency had customers turning a cold shoulder towards the coffee program offered by Big Apple Food Stores (South Paris, ME). Through several acquisitions of stores throughout Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire, the chain has grown to 94 stores—but these acquisitions also created a lack of uniformity. Coffee was one area Big Apple wanted customers to be familiar with, no matter which store they visited.

Prior to teaming up with Eight O'Clock Coffee (Montvale, NJ), Big Apple was “buying and brewing” the best deals it could find, according to Mike Doucette, director of purchasing and merchandising for Big Apple Food Stores. About eight years ago the company began to investigate coffee programs it could implement chainwide, giving the stores a focal point around which it could continue to build. Even though Eight O'Clock Coffee didn't have a huge presence in convenience stores at the time, the company worked with Big Apple on a pilot test in a few stores. The results: immediate success.

“It's cold up here and we have a lot of coffee competition,” says Doucette. “A lot of coffee drinkers in Maine go to mom-and-pop restaurants, Dunkin Donuts and other chains. With Eight O'Clock Coffee we hold our own. We have a limited population up here, and even with our chain spread throughout New England, we're doing a superior job retaining our customers. And Eight O'Clock Coffee has had a lot to do with that.

“We purchase a lot of single stores with different coffee programs,” he adds. “Often we see volume go up within three months of

us purchasing the store after switching the program over to Eight O'Clock Coffee. And [Eight O'Clock] has been great with helping us outfit our different size stores. They have everything from the simplest backdrops to nice canopies to paint schemes. No matter what size the location, they have something that will fit and make an improvement.”



Eight O'Clock Coffee does not charge its retailers or distributors for the point-of-purchase materials it provides, according to company Director of Foodservice Glenn Cooper. The price of backdrops, menuboards, island canopies and any other merchandising vehicles a retailer might require is built into the price of the product, and the company is constantly enhancing its merchandising capabilities.

But even more important than a uniform image, Big Apple wanted to deliver a consis-

tent cup of coffee. Eight O'Clock's rigorous quality control program was just what the chain was looking for. Eight O'Clock personnel visit stores twice a year to rate retailers' coffee programs on appearance, POP, freshness, cleanliness and associates' attitudes toward customers. The vendor then compiles reports for store managers to be used in group training sessions.

“A chain has to be willing to invest the time and adhere to the quality control procedures,” says Cooper. “You could have the best coffee, but if you don't take care of the process customers won't come back. It takes a lot of work, but it's worth it. We have noticed an absolute correlation between high-scoring stores and the most significant

increases in coffee sales.”

Big Apple, using Eight O'Clock's program as a base, also conducts its own quality assurance program with quarterly inspections and independent mystery shoppers.

“The quality assurance program alone has probably bumped our total volume up 20% to 25%,” Doucette says. “Consistency and training

in brewing a good pot of coffee are basic steps, but they're important to run a program correctly.

“The difference Eight O'Clock Coffee has made in our stores is like night and day—from selling a few pounds of coffee per week per location to 50 to 60 pounds per week at any given store,” Doucette adds. “It's the consistency of the brew and the quality assurance; from northern Maine to southern New Hampshire to western Vermont, people recognize and appreciate the consistent flavor we're able to produce.”

—Kate Buczko, Associate Editor

For more information on *Eight O'Clock Coffee*, circle 200 on the Inquiry Card.