

Coles Shoots Self in Foot in 'Battle' of the 'Supermarket Giants'

by shopper *Thursday, Jan 24 2013, 11:51pm*

international / prose / post

A recent story in the [Sydney Morning Herald](#) feigning some sort of "battle" between an infamous Australian supermarket duopoly clearly required a broader perspective, which I happened to be in the perfect position to provide.



As the retail food market tightens in Oz the infamous supermarket duopoly of Coles and Woolworths, have begun a friendly, 'fierce' competitive battle for shoppers' dollars.

Wesfarmers/Coles have been spending millions of dollars on store refurbishments (more on that later) while simultaneously making drastic price reductions on reconstituted -- as distinct from whole natural milk -- shop brand milk and deadly cheap bleached and supremely unhealthy white flour bread products. It seems the health and well being of Coles shoppers takes a back seat to the Coles bottom line, while Woolworths, in contrast, now carries a well known Australian health food brand of broad range products, including organics, for their customers; "it's long range thinking," management informed me, the health food market in the US is worth billions annually, but it's a nice, helpful, healthy touch for discriminating local shoppers, notwithstanding that Woolies' upper management is also acutely aware of their bottom line, but why shouldn't everybody win?

Now consider the competence level and general helpfulness of shop staff, floor managers and upper management, which makes all the difference in a tight marketplace. There is no doubt that Woolies is the overall leader in that regard.

After suffering considerable inconvenience during shop refurbishments at Coles Eastgate Bondi Junction, I was astonished to discover that a broad range of fresh food (vegetable) products previously available to late shoppers had been taken from 'new ice tray' displays to cool-room storage *during trading hours* -- no doubt a stroke of pure (incompetent) genius from upper management to make once available stock unavailable to shoppers after spending millions of dollars on shop renovations and 'upgrades.'

It seems that new counterproductive, labour intensive and costly ice tray displays supporting an assortment of vegetables, most of which react badly to prolonged contact with ice, require the ice to be removed, trays cleaned and topped-up with fresh ice on a *daily basis*, a very labour intensive and needless procedure.

It was a simple matter to contact wholesale fresh food/vegetable suppliers and simply ask which vegetables are able to withstand ice storage without damage, flaccidity or sag, for extended periods of time; the answer from a number of fresh food suppliers was the same, only Broccoli and Brussel

Sprouts are shipped/stored in ice! However, as any Coles shopper would soon discover, Coles management in their 'supreme wisdom,' have placed a wide range of vegetables, including sensitive Asian vegetable varieties, on ice only to witness them sag and go flaccid in minutes; other more robust vegetables sag a little time later.

I have yet to discover the name of the imbecile upper manager/s at Coles who are primarily responsible for this fiasco, shareholders are entitled to know. I was also informed by floor staff that original refurbishments did not include these ridiculous ice tray displays, which were a later 'innovation.'

The final word on practical/efficiency matters should always come from the floor; staff in a number of local stores were unanimous in stating that traditional refrigerated cabinets with water spray nozzles for freshening vegetables are less labour intensive and store/present vegetables in much better condition for the consumer. They also offer produce to all shoppers day and night during trading hours.

It now becomes apparent why stock from ice displays was removed during trading hours, to avoid penalty payments to staff for working after hours. We can appreciate why management attempted to minimise costs on this unnecessary, ridiculous, counterproductive ice display arrangement.

Perhaps Coles/Wesfarmers retailing 'geniuses' would care to comment on this lapse of rational thinking and good retailing practice. The problem (syndrome rather) is obvious, too many 'top-down,' disconnected from floor staff, decisions were being made, usually on the 'golf course,' and not enough, floor-up input from staff -- but 'we' know best, don't we, 'now watch this drive?'

If I hadn't experienced this absurd calamity directly I wouldn't have believed it possible.

Wesfarmers directors would not be happy to learn of this fiasco while choking on their dinners watching a popular mass media current affairs program. However, upper management were advised not to ignore valid complaints from staff and shoppers, now watch 'this' drive!

See also:

<http://jungledrum.hopto.org/news/story-276.html>

Jungle Drum Prose/Poetry. <http://jungledrum.lingama.net/news/story-365.html>