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What's in a NAME?

Everyone already knows convenience stores are quick and easy, so find a name that sets you apart.



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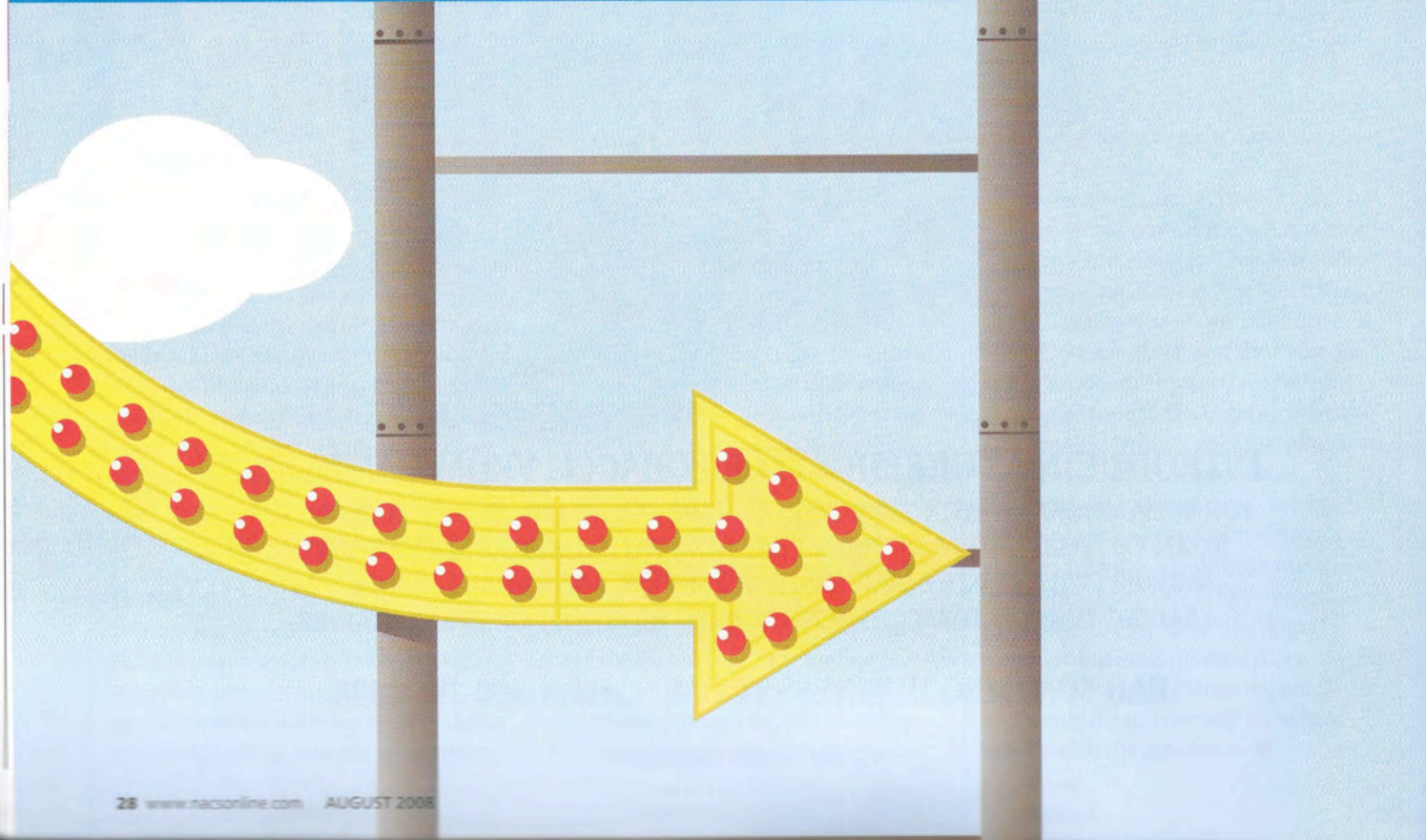
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WHAT'S IN A NAME?



That which we call “E-Z” by any other name would still be “easy.” But is “quick” or “easy” too obvious? What makes for a good store name?

BY MICHAEL KLEIN

William Shakespeare’s star-crossed young lover, Juliet Capulet, begins Act Two of *Romeo & Juliet* by imploring her love, Romeo, to abandon his name. “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose; By any other name would smell as sweet...doff thy name; And for that name, which is no part of thee; Take all myself,” she tells him.

Not a bad offer, and to his credit, Romeo tries, but he quickly learns an important lesson in love and family rivalry that translates to today’s business world: Names are pretty important.

Some psychologists tell us first names can predetermine a successful, happy life with dependable, successful-sounding names like Adam, Jill or Brian – or doom us to a lifetime of disappointment, poor grades and hostile job interviews with less successful-sounding names like Agnes, Bertha or Vernon.

The same is true for names of companies and brands. New ventures spend thousands of dollars to come up with names each year, and existing companies spend millions to rebrand themselves with a new name after a merger, acquisition or scandal.

Naming consultants – businesses whose business is to help you name yours – have become prolific. A quick Internet search turns up well over 100 companies that will happily provide you with a new name and tagline for

your business or product. With names from the obvious, *The Naming Company*; to the quirky, *Igor International*; to the downright confusing, *A Hundred Monkeys*; to the wryly appropriate, *Eat My Words*; these firms know how to communicate whole ideas and mission statements with sometimes as few as two letters.

The process by which corporate namers ply their trade is interesting, and while there are varying philosophies and approaches, at some point creative people end up in a room with pads and pencils and whiteboards finding new applications for existing words (Amp and BlackBerry) and often making up totally new words (Viagra and Cingular).

A successful company or product name will have certain characteristics,

just as an unsuccessful one will. Alexandra Watkins of *Eat My Words*, a San Francisco naming firm, says her company runs every name through what they coined a “SMILE & SCRATCH Test.” A good name has a SMILE in it, as in: Simple, Meaningful, Imagery, Legs (carries the brand forward) and Emotional. Names you can SCRATCH off your list are: Spelling-challenged, Copycat, Random, Annoying, Tame, Curse of knowledge (an inside joke) and Hard to pronounce.

DID YOU KNOW?

“Fast” and “quick” are the two most common words in convenience store names.

YOU NEED TO
DO MORE THAN
HAVE A NAME
THAT INDICATES
YOU ARE FAST.



Spell It Write

If you know the business of convenience and petroleum retailing — and I assume you do if you are reading this — you may realize the industry is not going to do very well with Watkins' test. A quick glance at a list of NACS retail member stores unearths some pretty poorly spelled words, such as kwik, snak, speedee, minit, pik and sak.

But all is not lost. Watkins says the spelling issue might not apply to this industry.

"A convenience store isn't something that somebody is probably going to look up online," reasons Watkins. "The misspellings are very important if you have a business where people are going to have to Google it to find it, or type it into their Web browser. But a convenience store? You drive by and you stop in."

Watkins goes on to caution that nontraditional spellings could hurt a company from a business-to-business perspective. A potential sale or partnership could be lost by not being able to find your company again, or similar names with different spellings could create confusion in the marketplace.

In the early 1990s Kwik Trip Inc., based in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, renamed 40 of its Iowa stores to Kwik Star because the Kwik Trip radio ads were inadvertently sending customers into their competitor's store (Tulsa, Oklahoma-based QuikTrip).

"I think it ended up being a positive for us," says Kwik Trip's Vice President of Operations Support Stephen Loehr. "It enabled us to rebrand and reenergize those Iowa stores. They were becoming Kwik Stars, so we used the line 'A Star is Born.'"

Marketplace confusion or not, Watkins has other reasons to advise against using similar sounding names — something she calls "the copycat effect."

"My problem with 'quick' being spelled so many different ways or just even the name 'Quick' is that somebody had it first and they are using it," she explains. "Why are people trying to copy somebody else when they are not ever going to stand out? We would advise our clients that they really need to stand out in a sea of sameness. So instead of calling yourself 'Quick,' come up with something that is evocative of the same feeling as quick. For example, a fox is quick — there are so many things that are quick — try something new that is not going to get people confused."

Watkins did some quick brainstorming and came up several words that evoke a sense of quickness without using the word itself: breeze, snap, flash, blast, rocket, torpedo and whiplash. She also came upon a word she hopes someone will take as a name of a convenience store: nibble. "Nibble would make a great name for a convenience store — you're

Read-N-Learn

With the margins on fuel sales shrinking, if not disappearing completely thanks to credit card fees, more than ever retailers need to sell more than fuel to stay afloat. Could the power of suggestion help? Ask the proprietors of these stores:

- Pak-A-Sak (Portland, Indiana)
- Clark's Pump N Shop (Ashland, Kentucky)
- Pik N Run (and pay too, hopefully in Port Charlotte, Florida)
- Fill A Sack (Buras, Louisiana)
- Stop A Sec (Luck, Wisconsin)
- And the ever-optimistic Shop-A-Lott (Natchitoches, Louisiana)

just stopping in for a bite — it is so visually evocative, it's fun, it's easy to spell, easy to say. Really easy to remember!”

It's also the kind of company name that could expand beyond the brand, the way Google, technically a noun, has become a verb. Need information on something? Google it. Nibble would work in reverse, the verb becomes a noun. “What would you like for lunch today? How about Nibble?”

The Need for Speed

There is a school of thought, however, that many of the misspellings — or industry-specific spellings — are done purposely to evoke a sense of quickness. Though it takes the same amount of time to say “kwik” as it does “quick,” there is something about the first spelling that just looks faster. It is faster to write — one less letter — so perhaps subconsciously the consumer thinks going to Kwik Mart in Sturgis, South Dakota, will be faster than going to Puchi's Quick Stop in Nogales, Arizona. (Of course, if that's the case, then residents of Springfield, Illinois, are lucky — they have the Qik-n-EZ.)

“These names are allusions to the fact that they are quick stops for people who are very busy,” offers Russell Winer, William Joyce professor of Marketing at New York University's Stern School of Business.

And although plenty send that signal with a variation of the word quick — there's the Kwik Shop, Shop Quik, Pantry Quik, Quik-E Food Store, Joe's Kwik Marts, Brad's Kwik Store, Quik Mart, Quik Thrift Food Stores, Sam's Quik Shop, Cashion's Quik Stop, Kwik Trip Oil, and on and on — it is not just quick that gets the industry treatment. There's also Speedee Mart, Mac's Minit Mart, Fas Gas Convenience Stores, and the extremely quickly spelled, Fastrip and Snak-Atak stores of Carthage, Missouri.

But as seemingly extraneous letters are left by the wayside in the names of convenience stores, we must ask ourselves: It can be cute (Git 'n Gallup in Stillwater, Oklahoma), or even clever,



(Stop a Sec in Luck, Wisconsin), but is it necessary?

“I think people know at this point that convenience stores are very convenient and that they carry a wide range of products these days,” Watkins offers. “It’s going to be quick and fast, so

another angle would be to brand yourself with something that is more evocative of the service you provide, the quality or the range of merchandise. You can move beyond the fastness of it.”

Professor Winer agrees, but says you need to do more than just have a name that *indicates* you are more than fast — you need to actually *be* more than fast. “It’s the operations that are really critical,” he adds. “The way you differentiate is through product offerings. Maybe you become known for having the best coffee or the best hot dogs. The [store name] becomes the representation of the company in the customer’s mind, but the company needs to deliver on it through its communications and its stores — cleanliness and variety and friendliness of employees — customer service.”

Store names can also convey meaningful information to customers, such as hours of operation (24 Market in Wills Point, Texas), or what customers can expect to find inside (Loaf ‘N Jug in Pueblo, Colorado). Of course one of the most famous brand names in all of business began as a great conveyer of information, which is now largely irrelevant: 7-Eleven. In 1946, 7-Eleven branded all of its stores with that name to emphasize extended hours of operation: 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.

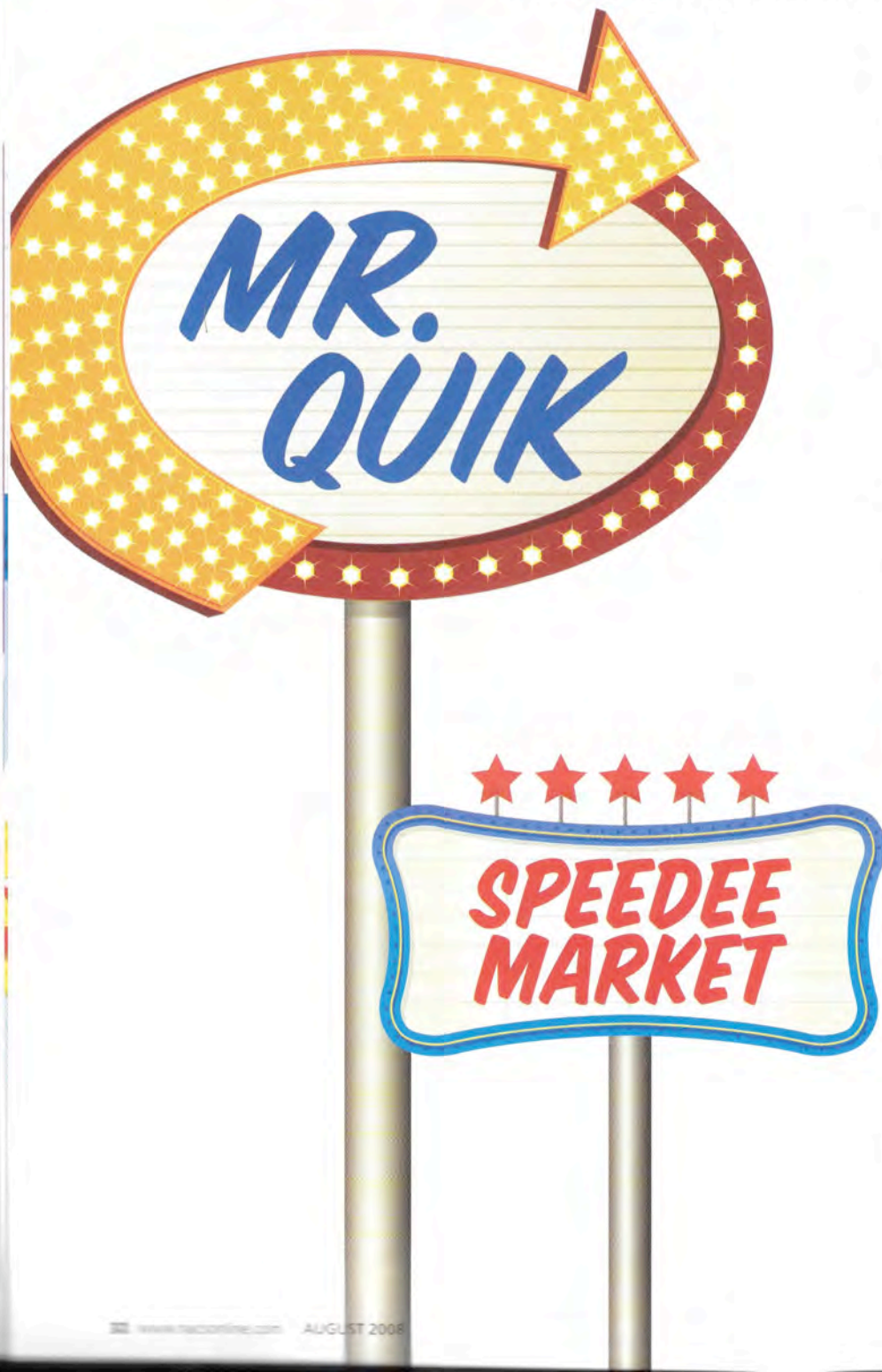
Some Good, Some Bad

What are some other names in the industry that are admired...or not?

Greg Parker of The Parker Companies in Savannah, Georgia, is partial to the name Store24. Parker’s properties used to be called Express Foods, but at the urging of his brother and friends he changed the name of his convenience stores to Parker’s, with the exception of his sole Parker’s Market gourmet store.

I asked naming guru Watkins about using a person’s name in a store name. Bill’s Superettes in Andover, Minnesota, was my example.

“If Bill is in the store at least a couple of times a week, and he is truly somebody who exists and can develop a relationship with customers, then it’s great,” Watkins says. “Using a first name gives it a personal



feel, instead of a big conglomerate chain where you might not be getting that personal attention. People are aching for that old school service — where the proprietor knows your name.”

Jay Ricker, president of Ricker Oil Company, tells how his customers actually named his stores, “We used the name Ricker’s because our customers were already calling us that and they called our fountain drinks Ricker Pop. We’ve kept the name, and since it came from our customers, I think it’s a nice compliment.”

Ricker goes on to say a name he thinks is one of the funniest and the worst in the business: El Cheapo, which is operated by The Sommers Corporation in Georgia.

It doesn’t take very long talking to industry people about store names before somebody mentions Kum & Go. The name is, for lack of a better word,

“THE RIGHT NAME CAN TURN INTO AN UNEXPECTED REVENUE STREAM.”

—ALEXANDRA WATKINS

unpopular. It makes Watkins literally wince. But few I spoke with are actually aware of the origins of the name.

In 1959, W.A. Krause and T.S. Gentle opened a filling station in Hampton, Iowa, and took the first letters of their last names, “K” and “G” to name the station. Looking for a catchy name to help them stand out, they filled the letters in and Kum & Go was born. About 445 stores later and with more than 300,000 customers every day, it’s hard to argue with their commercial success, whether or not you like the name.

Your Name Could Be Money

A growing trend in the business world — and one that Kum & Go gets — is the monetization of a store name. Watkins says her firm always factors that in when making name recommendations to clients. “If you have a cool enough name, you can sell merchandise with your name on it and people are going to buy it,” she says. “The right name can turn into an unexpected revenue stream.”

Watkins says at least two of her clients are likely making more money

**Our bold new look.
Your bottom line.**

The beer *Business Week* called “the most powerful brand among all alcohol beverages”* just got even more recognizable. The iconic, bold graphics of Budweiser’s current advertising campaign are now part of the packaging.

With its dynamic billboard effect, this new secondary packaging is poised to garner even greater exposure in the beer aisle for the Great American Lager.

So bring the bold new look of Budweiser to your beer cooler and watch the sales follow.

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*source: Business Week, August 6, 2007
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selling merchandise with their names on it than they are selling their primary products, and although Kum & Go's T-shirt sales likely will not outpace fuel and snack sales, one can purchase a T-shirt or hat displaying the company's logo and tagline.

"It has to be clever," Watkins advises. "There's a sandwich shop in San Francisco called Mr. Pickle's, and it's such a funny name people want it on a T-shirt. If you can turn your name into something [desirable] then it becomes a souvenir. You can turn your store into a destination."

Watkins points to the success of places like South of the Border and Wall Drug and suggests there are plenty of funny and interesting convenience

stores that should be able to monetize their names. Places like Grumpy's Convenience Store (Las Vegas), Mr. Gas Limited (Ontario, Canada), Passmore Gas & Oil, (Blythe, California, which is named after the owner's family, Richard Passmore), Hobo Pantry Food Store (Cowarts, Alabama) or Watkins' personal favorite, Cheap O Depot (Abbeville, Louisiana).

"Cheap O Depot is hysterical," she laughs. "Who wouldn't want a Cheap O Depot T-shirt? I could absolutely see Ashton Kutcher wearing one!"

Of course the merchandising won't work for everyone: There's nothing particularly special about the name Rainbow Food Mart (El Dorado,

Arizona), or Crossroads Deli & Market (Catlett, Virginia). And if you sport a T-shirt from Speedy Gas & Wash (Ballwin, Missouri), most people would probably assume you work there.

Having a Change of Heart?

So now having read this and thought about it a little, is there a name change in your future?

Few people like change. It brings about the unexpected, and in business, the unexpected can sometimes hurt you. One of the biggest name changing gaffes in history was after the merger of media giant Time-Warner with Internet pioneer AOL. Both entities had already gone through some name changing individually, then the two merged in 2000. The company name changed to AOL Time-Warner. Even the stock ticker changed (to AOL) and they spent a pretty penny rebranding themselves. Then the tech bubble burst and the company reported the biggest losses in American business history. Three years later the company name and stock ticker changed back to Time-Warner (TWC). Money well spent? Probably not.

Sonja Hubbard, CEO of E-Z Mart Stores Inc., doesn't see a name change in her company's future. "My dad actually came up with the name on a family trip. He noticed a freeway exit sign marked E-Z Off. And the one entering back on was, as expected, E-Z On. I remember him saying, 'Well then, why can't there be an E-Z Mart?' I like our name, I think it sums up exactly what a convenience store should be: E-Z."

If you do take the plunge and change your name, Watkins advises to communicate with your customers that the management, prices and friendly staff will remain intact. Additionally, she says a name change could present excellent marketing opportunities.

"The good thing about changing your name," she says, "is you have news all of a sudden. You can write a press release, and it gives you a great opportunity to have a promotion — an event.

The Potential!

It is difficult to predict what the public will respond to, but here are some store names that might work exceptionally well on a T-shirt — and some of these retailers might have already thought of that.



Cheap O Depot (Abbeville, Louisiana)

El Cheapo (Richmond Hill, Georgia)

Grumpy's Convenience Store (Las Vegas, Nevada)



The Local Yokel (Milton, Florida)

Mr. Gas (Burley, Idaho)

Mr. Gas Limited (Ontario, Canada)

Swallow Oil (Rifle, Colorado)



Shout & Sack (Vinita, Oklahoma) — What goes on in this store?

Wagin Cajun (Lake Charles, Louisiana)

Gaz-Bah Mini Shops (Columbia, South Carolina) — Music buffs would probably wear a T-shirt that said, "Rock the Gaz-Bah."

Hobo Pantry Food Store (Cowarts, Alabama) — Drop "Food Store"

Bionic Self Serve Food Mart (Waipahu, Hawaii) — Now that the TV show has once again been canceled, you might find Jaime Sommers here.

"Honorable mention" goes to a T-shirt that would likely be a hot seller in any college town: Quick-N-Easy or any spelling variation thereof.

Build something around the name — that's what a good name can do for you. I hope somebody takes Nibble!"

Whether or not we start to see Nibble stores popping up all over the country, remember this: Your name is important. It represents you and your company to the customers. It should convey what your business is all about, but don't be afraid to go beyond the basics: speedy, quick or easy. Find something that denotes that concept — an animal or another word entirely — and if it would be funny on a T-shirt, that couldn't hurt. ■

Michael Klein is a freelance writer living in Northern Virginia. He does not have a Cheap O Depot T-shirt, but he would wear one (XL). He can be reached at michael.klein18@verizon.net.

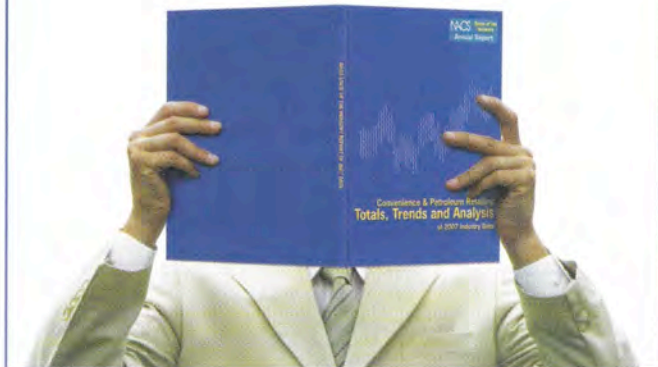
"SHOPPING AT THE KWIK-E-MART. I LIKE HOW 'KWIK-E' IS SPELLED WITH A 'K.' IT'S A QUICKER WAY OF SPELLING 'QUICK.'"

— NELSON MUNTZ, "THE SIMPSONS"

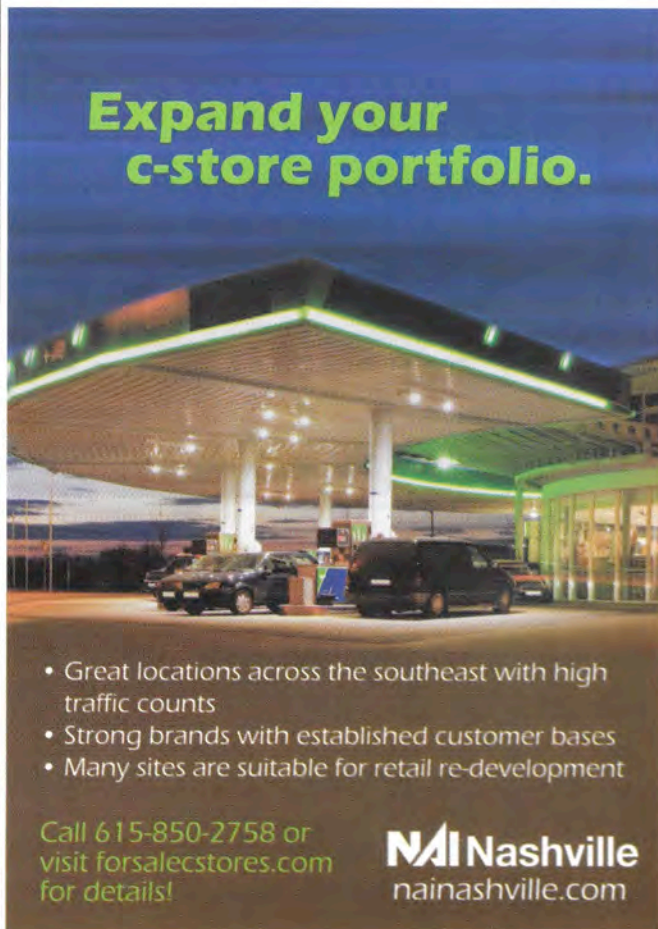
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