

> Savings, Convenience Key in Northwest

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Although the entire U.S. is enveloped in economic turmoil, the scene in the Pacific Northwest is not as severe as it is in other parts of the country.

Companies like Boeing and Microsoft have helped keep the region going, according to Randy Barcus, chief economist at Avista Corp., Spokane, Wash.

But many consumers are still looking for bargains, and some supermarkets here are hoping to reel them in with financial rewards and special prices, while other stores are simply trying to bring ease to their more upscale customers' lives.

Ray's Food Place, Brookings, Ore., is giving customers a chance to win money in two games running through the holidays under the Ray's Great Grocery Giveaway program.

The online game simply requires customers to sign up for the chance to win one of nine prizes, each worth \$2,600, with one winner per week. In stores, \$341,751 is being given away in free groceries, in the form of gift cards of \$100, \$50 and \$25 as well as vouchers ranging from \$25 to \$3.

To enter for a chance to win in-store, customers need to spend \$25 or more on groceries.

"The beauty of this is that all the winnings bring people back to Ray's," said Dan Cepeda, a spokesman for the chain.

Ray's has also nearly quadrupled the number of prizes since this program ran last year, to involve as many people as possible, Cepeda pointed out. And during the weeks it runs, check averages typically jump from the usual amount of around \$20 to \$25-plus.

"This year the program will resonate even more with our customers because of the economy," said Cepeda. "The things people need more are fuel and food, so there's nothing better to give back."

Stong's Market, a single-store in Vancouver, British Columbia, is also focusing on price for the holidays.

President Cori Bonina expects to see more emphasis this year on family and less on gift-giving.

"I think people are going to be spending their money on the little things that make the dining experience extra special. That's why we stock a large amount of specialty items and offer them at a price that doesn't make you feel like you are in a specialty store."

She also plans to continue the chain's Turkey Dollar promotion, where for every \$25 spent, customers get one Turkey Dollar, good towards the purchase of any turkey.

PCC Natural Markets, Seattle, meanwhile, is putting more emphasis on making life easy for its customers than on saving them money.

"Our focus is prepared holiday meals and all the goods that go with them," said Russ Ruby, director of merchandising.

This chain of nine stores has enhanced its website to make it easy to order a full meal online, but also launched a chainwide demo program the first weekend in **Related Articles**

November that serves two purposes: to let customers taste meals they can buy ready-prepared; or to encourage them to buy the ingredients and make the meals themselves.

To complement the program, wines are paired with the meals, to both educate customers and bump up their checks.

“One of the hottest areas right now, and it's almost counterintuitive, is prepared foods,” said Jim Hertel, managing partner at consulting firm Willard Bishop, Barrington, Ill.

The people buying these products, he said, are the consumers who have traditionally eaten in restaurants, and are now trading down as the economy takes its toll.

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