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DeMarrais: Supermarket promotions coming at us in novel ways

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RECORD COLUMNIST

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Discounts for seniors. Soft drink tie-ins. Branded beef. App-delivered coupons.

These may be the slow days of summer, but we're seeing lots of activity from local supermarket chains trying a variety of marketing programs to build business at a time already fierce competition gets even tougher.

Some are tried and true, such as ShopRite's Can-Can sale, the twice-a-year event to market canned goods at deep discounts that is perhaps the most successful promotional program in the industry.

But we're also seeing innovations, such as the growing use of apps and digital communications to bring messages — as well as coupons — to potential shoppers, the introduction of new lines of branded beef and locally raised poultry and increased benefits for shopping club members.

Anything to get them in the door and to come back.

"Especially in this market, which is very competitive, retailers are looking to hold onto their customers, to make them more loyal," said Brian Todd, president and chief executive of The Food Institute, an [Upper Saddle River](#) organization that tracks industry trends.

Perhaps the most significant innovation by the stores is the incorporation of social networking sites into their marketing. ShopRite brags that it is the only grocer on all three major mobile spaces — iPhone, Android and mobile Web — but each of its major competitors is promoting apps and digital communications to download circulars, promotions and coupons.

Others promotions include:

Coke is it: Buy Coca-Cola at Pathmark and get a discount coupon for Six Flags Great Adventure. Get an entry form at the Coke display at A&P to enter a drawing for a week at Long Beach Island next summer. Or buy any Coke product at Stop & Shop and enter a drawing for a family admission to Great Adventure.

Senior discounts: If you're 55 or older, you can get a 5 percent discount at Pathmark (on Mondays) or A&P (on Tuesdays) with a coupon and a \$30 purchase.

Checkout discounts: In a variation on its Thanksgiving turkey promotion, Stop & Shop offers 5 percent

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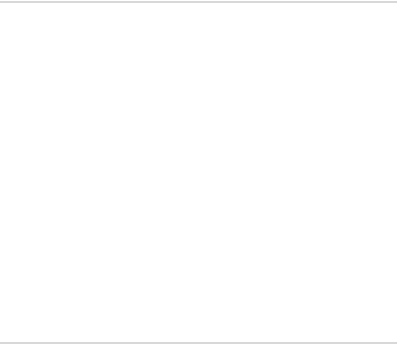
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discounts if you spend \$300 from June 24 to July 28.

Local meat: A new line of chicken, turkey and beef products — raised locally "by family-owned farms using humane and sustainable farming methods" and sold under the Mid-Atlantic Country Farms label — are at some A&P and Pathmark stores.

Branded beef: Perdue and Tyson got consumers to shop for branded chicken, and now A&P is trying to do the same with beef, replacing most unbranded beef with Woodson & James angus beef.

Discount clubs: Join A&P's Live Better Wellness Club and get 10 percent off prescriptions for a pet. Or join the Live Better Baby Club and get 10 percent off baby products at A&P or Pathmark.

And if you or a family member belong to a police or fire department, school staff, hospital staff, military, military reserves, or are a veteran or civil servant, you can save 5 percent the first Saturday of the month in Pathmark's "Salute to Local Heroes" promotion.

Rebates, discounts for seniors and other promotional efforts are aimed at making sure shoppers return to the store, Todd said.

North Jersey has long been a battleground for food stores, but not to the extent we're seeing now.

It's tough enough for ShopRite, A&P, Pathmark and Stop & Shop to compete against each other, but they must also face chains with a limited presence, such as Kings, Whole Foods, Foodtown, Acme, Trader Joe's and Food Basics.

In addition, they compete with a growing number of small and specialty grocers, such as the new Aldi in Clifton and Fresh Market in Montvale, and the iconic Fairway Market in Paramus.

If that weren't enough, other retailers — from drugstores to the big boxes — are increasing their food offerings. Target is even remodeling stores to make more space available for food.

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