**Spring 2009 Projects**

This year’s retail client was Sweetbay Supermarket. Sweetbay Supermarket is a chain of supermarkets located entirely in Florida. As of July 2008, there were 107 Sweetbay stores in operation. The company is headquartered in Tampa, Fla., and is a part of the Delhaize Group (Belgium-based). In January ‘04, Sweetbay Supermarket concept created its core markets on the West Coast of Florida by converting from Kash n’ Karry suffered from slumping sales growth. In the beginning of the semester, the client company provided an overview of corporate/marketing strategies by hosting students and providing tours of selected stores in different customer clusters. Contacts from the retail client are provided to students. To support research, four consulting firms (Retail Forward-TNS, NPD Group, Kurt Salmon Associates and The Exhibium Group-Global Retail Solutions) shared their knowledge related to grocery industry and visual marketing audits with students. At the end, students presented their recommendations to the CEO and senior executives of the client company. Many of the recommendations, which were validated by concurrently conducted marketing research with the third company, are currently considered for adoption. Student teams were responsible for designing and executing all phases of the project. Below are the summary of each project and comments from students.

**Group A: SWOT analysis and Corporate Strategy:** Group A focused on assessing the current positioning strategies of all Florida Sweetbay Supermarkets and identifying future opportunities to drive sustainable growth. Specifically, the analyzed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats existing both internally and externally to the company, and developed methods for Sweetbay to succeed in a competitive environment. The group conducted a vast amount of research on consumer trends within grocery markets, the marketing tactics of Sweetbay's competitors, and the brand communication strategies that are employed within diverse markets. Additionally, the group created a survey to determine consumer preferences and analyze consumers’ thought processes while viewing advertisements.

**Group A report: SWOT analysis and Corporate strategy**

**Group B: Deli marketing and Visual Merchandising Strategy:** Group B was in charge of finding ways to improve the Sweetbay deli, both from a visual marketing and a profit standpoint. Throughout the semester the group used a variety of resources to help gather information to better determine not only where the deli could be improved, but more importantly what the customer actually wanted out of this very profitable section of the supermarket. We conducted focus groups, an online survey consisting of over 200 participants, and enlisted the help of an outside consultant to analyze the visual appeal of the deli compared to Publix. The group pinpointed the sub shop as having the most potential and spent the majority of our time working in this area. The final recommendations here included implementing a combo meal, noting customers preferred price and item choices. We also came up with innovative ways to first educate the customer on the value of Sweetbay’s premium meat option. From a visual marketing standpoint, the strongest recommendation revolved around the idea of placing some signs perpendicular to the customers’ traffic patterns allowing them to better see where the deli is located and what it has to offer.

**Group B report: Deli marketing and visual merchandising strategy**
Project Team C: Improving the Performance of Gainesville Sweetbay Supermarket: Group C’s mission for Sweetbay Supermarket was to increase the foot traffic and influence customers’ traffic patterns in the Gainesville store, and increase items purchased per customer. We made four main recommendations to improve the Gainesville store; these were to change the traffic patterns of the customer by re-routing them towards the produce, to improve the produce section layout to make it more appealing to customers, to create exciting cross-merchandising and endcap displays, and to increase advertising for the Gainesville store. The group supported these recommendations by evidence as provided by focus groups, observation data, and a survey.

Group C report: Improving the performance of Gainesville Sweetbay Supermarket

Student Commentary:

I can say with confidence that this course played a key role in my development as a business student. The materials and objectives of this course encompassed all of the concepts I have been learning the past four years in the school of business. For once I was able to see how these concepts actually fit into a real life business strategy, giving me confidence in my business skills as I enter the workforce. I would highly recommend this course to students who are less interested in taking a business class and more interested in having a business experience...by Ben Artis

I got a lot more out of this course than any other course I’ve taken at UF. Where as in other business courses we learn about the business world, in this class we experienced the real world. The class gave us hands on experience with real retail problems. We went on real business trips to meet with real big time executives. We visited stores to learn the inner workings of the company and what goes on behind the scenes. A large part of our experience was conducting research and compiling what we found into reports to be presented, just like the real world. We had to organize our own focus groups and conduct our own observations. Perhaps one of the coolest things about the class was the big survey we created to be taken by UF students. Almost every business student remembers the extra credit surveys for Marketing and other business courses. Our survey was one of those extra credit assignments! It was really cool being on the other side of the extra credit surveys and understanding why professors offer extra credit for them. The class was extremely rewarding because we got to see our hard work come together in a final presentation to the company’s CEO. Some of our suggestions are actually being implemented, which is an amazing feeling. It’s wonderful knowing I can walk into a store and be able to point out something that came from one of our ideas! ... by Thomas M. Robey.

My experience in the Retail Team Project course was phenomenal! It was a great opportunity to incorporate all the valuable skills I learn in the classroom and to use them in real situations. Working one on one with store managers and corporate executives gave me a genuine perspective of what to except when I enter the working world. The employees of Sweetbay were extremely cooperative and really helped our class gather the information necessary to do our research and to come up with valid and
respectable recommendations for their company. It was a valuable and very enjoyable experience. I am very glad to have had this tremendous opportunity and I recommend all business majors to take this fun and hands-on course! ..by Rachael Adams

This experience enabled us to build invaluable relationships, as we often consulted with the Corporate Executives and Store Managers at Sweetbay, as well as Pyperpaul & Kennedy Advertising Agency, to discuss our ideas for the marketing and advertising campaigns. We also consistently interacted with the other teams within the retailing class to ensure that we were collaboratively working toward the overall goal of increasing Sweetbay’s brand awareness among its target consumers. Our communication and presentation skills became a vital aspect of conveying our ideas to the other teams, as we were always analyzing new information and formulating fresh ideas. Overall, the project required us to think critically in a fast-paced environment, as every day presented new challenges and obstacles to overcome as our research progressed. The course prepared us for real-life scenarios that will aid us in our future careers. ..by Jenney Petrie.

Taking the Retail Projects class has been a wonderful and challenging experience. It is my first college class in which I have been truly allowed to think independently and creatively, and which challenged me to stretch my knowledge to its limits. Working for a real company gave me the chance to actually see my ideas implemented in the store- which was a delight! How rewarding to work at something all semester and see it created for a retailer- and becoming a success for them! Working within a team setting was also a great learning experience. Working with all different types of students gave me real insight into what a future work setting might be like. Although finding a common opinion wasn’t always easy, it was rewarding when we came to a strong consensus and moved forward. I definitely feel more prepared for my future workplace now, and have many more strategies for how to work with a diverse workforce. I would highly recommend this course to other students. I think all students can benefit from a course that allows them to put all their book knowledge into a real-world setting. It really allows you to learn, and turn abstract concepts into concrete ideas. This class is a must for any marketing or business major! ..By Gentry Adams

The experience I have gained from the Marketing Retail Project class is a real-world marketing experience that will carry on to the rest of my academic tenure and my future employment in the marketing field. It has taught me valuable skills that I can use in any environment; whether studying in school, volunteering in the community, or presenting to a student organization. It has also given me experience interacting and leading a group of fellow students in a structured environment. It is a University of Florida undergraduate class but it is structured more like a graduate class, which allows the students more flexibility and creativity than the average undergraduate class. I also have a great work experience to talk about in an interview. When employers inquire when I have implemented the book knowledge that I have learned in college and in my marketing class, I have a concrete experience that draws together all of my knowledge in a practical application. I can also say that I acted as a student consultant of a major corporation and developed a marketing plan full of well-researched recommendations
on how to increase revenue and traffic to a local Gainesville retail store. .... *By Andrew Kisz*

When I first applied for the Retail Team project class, I didn’t know what exactly to expect, but I was excited to join a class that was out of the ordinary. I highly enjoy working in groups as well, so I thought the class would be a good fit for me. MAR4933 was definitely one of my favorite classes as a student at the University of Florida. I never really knew how to research thoroughly or write a project plan for a corporation, but I learned quickly and by doing, which, in my opinion, is much better than learning from a textbook. When you apply what you learn, you learn it best, which is exactly what happened to me in MAR4933. I believe I can now craft a marketing plan for a corporation and research out in the field, two great skills I can apply to my future in corporate marketing. I enjoyed working with everyone in my group and believe that we will all be friends in the future. We worked very well and very diligently together, and by splitting up all our work, got to help each other as well as contribute to the overall project in the class. In this way, we learned specialization as well as team-building. I believe our results show that when everyone works hard in a group, great things can be accomplished. This class also helped me with my presenting skills. With group presentations each week, I learned to be a better public speaker, and this helped me present in front of Sweetbay corporate headquarters. It was thrilling to be able to present in front of Sweetbay’s CEO and know our ideas were taken seriously. This class was a great experience for me personally, and if it was offered every semester I would want to take it again in the fall! ....*By Kristen Messich*