The 2003 University of Florida and Office Depot Retailing Smarter Symposium brought hundreds of retailers together for ideas, strategies and information to assist the industry during times of economic challenges and recovery.

Bart Weitz, Executive Director of the Miller Center for Retailing Education and Research launched the symposium by thanking Office Depot’s Chairman and CEO, Bruce Nelson for his partnership with the Miller Center for this and upcoming symposiums.

Topics for this year’s symposium were developed to assist retailers in driving through the turbulence of retail changes by offering information on managing large changes within companies, offering excellent customer service, marketing private brands and achieving profitability. Common ideas were the importance of company culture, the development of the associate and strategies for leadership.

This year the symposium featured the Florida Retail Federation Retailer of the Year Awards for

Vanessa Castagna, Chairman, and Chief Executive Officer of JCPenney Stores, Catalog, and Internet and Executive Vice President of JCPenney Company, Inc. spoke about JCPenney’s five-year turnaround at the Retailing Smarter 2003 Symposium. JCPenney is in the third year of their five-year turnaround. The company became centralized in 2000, after 99 years of decentralization. Now all stores are connected and operated at the corporate level rather than the store level.

The change to become centralized did not happen over night. They faced many challenges within the company including skepticism and resistance. There were 3 phases of change: Get Moving 2000-2001, Constant Motion 2002, and Acceleration 2003. JCPenney had five strategic priorities that included Merchandise, Marketing, Store Environment, Expenses, and People. In order to facilitate change, they had to discover weaknesses within the company. They found that they were not competitive, not relevant, and not consistent among the stores. After analyzing their practices, they underwent a major systematic change from 1100 decision makers at the store level, which proved to be slow and lacked accountability, to a faster and more flexible centralized buying under one company plan.

The stores also experienced some changes. JCPenney created centralized checkouts throughout the store in order to offer their customers better service. Trend Right Merchandise was another transformation for the stores. This merchandise was more relevant for their customer including deep pocket sheets and stain-resistant pants. One important component of the change was to get their suppliers on-board. Due to the prior decentralization and loose delivery dates, merchandise was not being delivered quickly and orders were not filled adequately. By gathering suppliers support, JCPenney was able to get merchandise in the stores earlier, therefore, becoming more competitive and providing customers with a greater selection. In addition, merchandise is now prepped before it hits the floor saving JCPenney money and in-store hours.

JCPenney also made some changes in marketing. The one-day sales event was a new avenue to increase traffic in the stores and to show customers the new and improved JCPenney. They created a new customer service model. In just 24 months, 13 new store support centers were created.

Castagna said the company’s goal is to be the dominant retailer in the mall for the consumer. Their brand promise is to deliver to the customer.

JCPenney’s focus is on women because 80% of their customers are female. They rolled out a new line of contemporary sportswear in 540 stores. It has a moderate price point offering quality and affordability for the consumer. Bisou Bisou a line designed by Michelle Bobbot, is now available at JCPenney. By working directly with the designer,
**THE INGREDIENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL COMPANY**

by Erica Cheng

The mission statement of Modell’s Sporting Goods: Modell’s Sporting Goods strives for quality and excellence by listening, respecting and responding to the needs of our valued associates and customers. We pledge to continue to find innovative ways to deliver exceptional value and quality service.

Modell shared a story about an airline customer service representative at Jet Blue Airlines. She demonstrated how a company needs to respond to a customer’s needs. The representative was friendly, respectful, and worked to ensure that her customers all received proper service. When customers were late for flights, she called the customers, walked them through the check-in process, and in a friendly manner, reminded them not to be late the next time. She embraced the customers, and cared about customers. Good customer services can then provide repeat customers and repeat their businesses.

Mr. Modell stressed listening to customers and the company associates, but making changes based upon what they share this is vital. Every month at Modell’s Sporting Goods, meetings are held in the corporate office where focus groups give feedback for improvement and information. During various breakfast roundtables, one associate from each department discusses necessary changes within the company. Mr. Modell asks the participants to think of one question the employee has about the company before he/she goes to sleep every night. The feedback is collected from these events and becomes the time to change is now.

When Modell’s Sporting Goods approached the first company change, it was the result of feedback from a 16 year old boy. Modell’s listened to the boy talk about the merchandise assortments, the window advertisement and the company catalogs then worked to improve. “The day you stop listening to your customers is the day you are in trouble”. Listening is a very important technique to remain successful. Listen to your customers, listen to the market, and listen to the employees.

“The day you stop learning, you stop growing”. This is how Mr. Mitchell Modell, Chief Executive Officer of Modell Sporting Goods introduced the first ingredient of a successful company. As more competitors enter the market, Modell’s Sporting Goods continues to change to prevent the competition from gaining an advantage. Mr. Modell challenges all retailers to ask if their company goes out of business tomorrow, what would the customers miss about the company? How would they feel? Where would they shop? If you can’t answer the question honestly, the time to change is now.

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Successful companies should embrace changes. Companies should listen to their associates and customers in order to succeed in the future. •

**RETAILING SMARTER continued from page 1**

Leadership presented by Jose Calvo and Richard McAllister of the FRF. The 2003 Royal Recipients included Adelia Hunt Tush of CB’s Saltwater Outfitters in Siesta Key, Kelly Palmer of Hayloft, Inc., in Fort Myers and Al Rowland of Winn Dixie Stores in Jacksonville.

Next years Retailing Smarter Symposium will be held at Disney’s Contemporary Resort on June 24th and 25th, 2004. Mark your calendars! •
“Give me a ‘W’! Give me an ‘A’! Give me an ‘L’…!” So go the enthusiastic voices of Wal-Mart interns and associates as they kicked off the second day of the Retailing Smarter Symposium with the company cheer. Gathering people to cheerfully sing about a company at 8:00 in the morning is a feat not many people can accomplish, but Coleman Peterson does it effortlessly. As Executive Vice President of Wal-Mart’s People Division, Mr. Peterson utilizes his 29 years of Human Resource experience to “getting, keeping and growing” terrific associates. He attributes his success to the Wal-Mart culture and founder Sam Walton’s unique business sense.

In his speech, entitled “Culture and Stuff,” Mr. Peterson divulged the secret to the company’s success: its people. Wal-Mart is renowned for its helpful associates who genuinely care about the customer. It is hard not to notice the company’s profound influence on the retail industry with 1.3 million associates worldwide. The accolades Wal-Mart has received recently are a perfect example: it was voted as the 2002 Number One Most Admired Company in the U.S by Fortune magazine, as well as 2003 Top Fortune 500 Company. Wal-Mart is also the largest employer of Hispanics and African-Americans in the U.S, proving the desire to reflect the neighborhoods where their stores are located.

How is Wal-Mart able to train people to care as much as they do? Well, it all begins with the hire. To emphasize his point, Mr. Peterson mentioned a conversation Sam Walton had. The man asked, “How much do you pay people to smile?” Mr. Sam replied, “Why don’t I just hire smiling people?” The rule of thumb at Wal-Mart is, “hire for attitude, train for skill.” Anyone can be taught the mechanics of their job, but compassion and sincerity cannot be adopted overnight.

Certainly, Mr. Sam was quite a visionary when it came to managing people in a retail setting. How then, has Wal-Mart been able to continue the traditions started by its extroverted founder? The answer is by having its culture ingrained so deeply in the company that it is impossible to imagine Wal-Mart without it. Its corporate beliefs—respect for the individual, customer service, and the strive for excellence—are the basis for its continued existence, and without dedicated associates the corporate culture would be fruitless. As Mr. Peterson proclaimed, “things get done because people make them happen.”

In addition to hiring people with the passion for customer service, Wal-Mart has seen to it that its associates feel cared for as well. After all, if people do not feel appreciated by a company, not only will they not serve the customer as wholeheartedly, but chances are they will look for employment elsewhere.

In order to prevent occurrences like that from happening, the Open Door policy was implemented. It states that any associate can speak to any member of management about anything, without fear of retaliation. Paired with the Grass Roots survey—an annual, two-part process aimed at assessing what is important to the associate and identifying opportunities for improvement—Wal-Mart has proven that it is listening to its people. Most other companies today do not have as many employee-geared programs as Wal-Mart does, but as Lee Scott, CEO, asserts, we never have been like the rest. “Our legacy is that of being unique, swimming upstream, doing things others think impossible.”

Coleman Peterson’s enthusiasm for Wal-Mart and its associates could not be hidden during his discourse, and it is no wonder. As the company says, “Our people make the difference.” Considering the $244 billion in sales each year, it would be foolish to disagree.

JCPENNEY continued from page 1

JCPenney can purchase the merchandise for less than half the cost. The jewelry department also faced some changes. The merchandise and layouts received a makeover. It is JCPenney’s goal to be in the gift business and this new look is helping them to achieve their goal.

In closing, Castagna cited some lessons in change. First, the customers drive everything JCPenney does. Next, the right people in the right jobs are the key to success. Lastly, results and performance are the key measures of success. Although much has changed in the company, much has stayed the same. Come see the Bigger, Better, Bolder side of JCPenney! ♦
Naturalizer may have been introduced in the "Roaring 20s," but as the fastest growing women's shoe brand today, the brand clearly is still roaring.

Today, Naturalizer is the leading wholesale brand at Brown Shoe, and is sold at 400 retail stores in the United States and Canada, as well as countless department and independent stores across the US. The brand was named one of the fastest growing major women's fashion shoe brands by NPD and holds the 3rd place position in the market share race for women's fashion footwear. But, as Senior Vice President and General Manager Brad Adams told the Retail Smarter Symposium, the brand was not always this successful.

The brand was created in 1927 to meet a critical need in the fashion industry – women's shoes that were stylish as well as wearable. Before Naturalizer, women's footwear was either fashionable and uncomfortable or functional and orthopedic-looking.

Naturalizer’s distinctive brand image was officially launched in 1938 with powerful results. Women everywhere began to recognize the Naturalizer name as synonymous with quality, comfort and fit. The early styles were smart-looking for the time period, the epitome of sophistication and sober, sensible living. The brand also meant quality to the women of the 1940s, who bought $5 million dollars worth of Naturalizer shoes in 1945.

The first Naturalizer specialty store opened in 1954 in Jamaica, New York, offering the best service, selection and fit, with the wide range of sizes and widths for which the brand had become known. Over the next 25 years, the brand continued its rapid growth, both in the Naturalizer retail stores that cropped up nationwide as well as in fine department stores.

In the 1980s, the brand's popularity, which seemed timeless, began to fade as its styles aged along with its customers. By designing shoes for its long-time shoppers, Naturalizer wasn't meeting the needs of younger women with greater purchasing power.

The brand, however, had two undeniable strengths: a strong association with comfort and high consumer awareness.

"Women knew that Naturalizer was a leading footwear brand, and that it stood for comfort. Unfortunately, it stood for a geriatric comfort women associated with their mothers," said Adams. "We began a complete overhaul of our footwear design process, adding younger, European styling, but with Naturalizer’s legendary comfort. We still wanted women to know us for comfort, but we redefined it as the sensual comfort of sinking into luxurious, beautiful shoes."

In 1997, Brown Shoe created a style center in Florence, Italy and began redesigning and updating its Naturalizer collections. Designers took their inspiration from the high-fashion European culture and focused on developing a line of footwear that retained Naturalizer's emphasis on comfort, but was also sleek, stylish and fun to wear.

Naturalizer began its public reinvention in 1999 by hiring a new advertising agency, Shahid & Co., New York, to develop its next campaign. Shahid paired the brand with hip, edgy photographer Bruce Weber to develop a black and white photo series used for print advertising in women's magazines, the Naturalizer catalog and the brand’s web site, www.naturalizeronline.com. The playful, emotional, romantic photos cast Naturalizer as a fashion-forward, sometimes daring brand well-suited to the modern woman.

The photos filled Naturalizer's retail stores, which began to shift in 1999 to a cleaner, more natural
Vince Barabba, Chairman of the Internet Home Alliance and Bill Kenney, Board of Directors, Internet Home Alliance and Vice President, Emerging Home Solutions of Sears, Roebuck and Company have been together for over two years working toward the goal of expanding technology into the home. Their association allows the companies involved to share intelligence in the market. For example, Whirlpool is partnering with IBM as well as other companies to try and produce a refrigerator-stove in one.

Bill Kenney began by discussing the questions businesses need to ask themselves: What is going on in the market with new technology? What does this mean to the customer? What needs to be done? Mr. Kenney said that as a result of all the new technological breakthroughs that the product-centric world is likely to change. He compared this change in companies to “the calm before the storm” by explaining how at the beginning, competitors are at equilibrium (all on a level playing field). Then, there is some technological breakthrough, or a competitor that comes up with an innovative idea or approach, which brings change to the market. As a result, companies need to react and adapt to this change in order to stay afloat. Mr. Kenney gave a great example of this with Wal-Mart which had a different cost structure of inventory that caused the competition to react. He then reverted back to his analogy and referred to Wal-Mart as “the storm”. Mr. Kenney went into specifics on exactly what four technologies are currently disrupting the industry: Internet, broadband, digital, and wireless. These four forces combined effects the lives of everyone from the office, to homes, to entertainment. He then discussed how businesses have to operate in order to survive through the opportunity of systems thinking. The lesson here is simply that retailers must look at all the functions of the business as a whole. Kenney compared the old business model to a puzzle saying that each piece was separate and did not affect other pieces of the puzzle. In today’s society, businesses don’t work that way. Instead, Barabba compared today’s business model with that of a molecular structure. With this model, certain aspects of the business effect other aspects of the business. Kenney and Barabba suggested that we all adapt our way of thinking from a puzzle structure to more of a molecular structure. This can be accomplished by reacting to any new changes to one part of the business by seeing how it affects all the other areas of a business and then responding accordingly.

Due to the digital technology many products that are being sold “converge” with other products. For example, digital cameras, camcorders, and mp3 players all connect (converge) with computers now. Businesses must now consider how to sell these things to the customers now that technological products all converge with each other? How do businesses get more intimate with these parts of the home? One way is to collaborate with companies that can teach businesses how to be more relevant with customers. Retailers now need to become more fluent in talking to companies that until recently had no relevance to retailing.

Mr. Barabba added that, “Customers feel that the whole enterprise is seen as being greater than the sum of its parts.” Customers see how the parts come together and if the customer sees that just one area of the business isn’t current, it effects how they perceive the company as a whole and they will stop buying from them. Businesses must know how to incorporate systems of interdependencies so that they can become more relevant to consumers. Retailers must decide whether the new technologies are going to be good for business.

NATURALIZER continued from page 4

look. The new stores were truly inviting to customers, and changed window displays every two weeks to keep them coming back.

Today’s Naturalizer may be closer in spirit to its 1927 debut, which emphasized style, glamour and sophistication. While comfort remains a hallmark of the Naturalizer label, that cushy feel is now combined irresistibly with some of the season’s hottest trends.

Since 1999 Naturalizer has increased sales by more than 75 percent, and lowered the average age of its customer from 64 to about 40, with the fastest growing segment between 30-40. In light of its successful turnaround, Footwear News, the industry’s top publication, named Naturalizer “Brand of the Year” in 2001 – further proof that, although the brand has been around for 75 years, in some ways it’s just getting started.
The Retailing Smarter Symposium for 2003 consisted of inventive and groundbreaking individuals who have revolutionized the retailing industry. One person in particular who has made a tremendous impact on retail is ProfitLogic President and Vice-Chairman, Scott Friend. Friend has a bachelor’s degree from Brown University in electrical engineering and economics and a master’s degree from Harvard Business School, which he received with Honors. An impressive academic background is supported by years of experience with high tech firms where he used innovative information technology to improve retail operations. Friend’s company, ProfitLogic is the leading provider of Retail Merchandise Optimization software. In his symposium presentation, he explained how his company’s solutions can dramatically improve a retailer’s economic performance through enhanced merchandising decision-making.

With cutthroat competition, eroding margins, and lack of differentiation among players, merchants need to rethink how they run their business and how they are going to continue to drive sales, profit, and shareholder value. ProfitLogic’s Merchandise Optimization Suite of analytical applications empowers merchants at each point of the decision making process by providing insights into store level demand and the effects of decisions on sales and profitability prior to execution. It analyzes historical merchandise performance, current sales, inventory information, retailer specific business objectives and constraints to produce recommended actions. By eliminating time-consuming manual analysis and through identifying items needing immediate attention, merchants don’t lose sight of key issues. The result is more time, smarter decisions, better merchandising and ultimately, improved financial performance.

In Friend’s words, “Retail used to be a simple business, but that’s no longer the case.” With increased competitive pressure, shorter product life cycles, and demanding customers, the retailer environment has become complex, to say the least. ProfitLogic helps retailers get closer to the customer. It tackles the problem of Merchandise Optimization by asking how the customer buys. By understanding customers’ buying behavior by store, it can provide visibility to future demand at the store, market or regional-level. It is crucial in this competitive industry to have data on what you are buying and who you are selling it to.

An interesting analogous example unfolded in the Airline industry about 15 years ago. At that time, the large established airlines (like American Air) began suffering from the ability of low-cost regional airlines (like People’s Express) to offer extremely low fares. The large established players couldn’t compete on cost, so they had to find a better way. The answer, they found, was hidden in one of their highly valuable, unexploited and unique assets – the vast data warehouse in which they stored years of information on their “merchandise” (the routes and flights) and their customers. By implementing advanced analytical tools in combination with this incredibly powerful data asset, American Airlines and others were able to find smarter ways to manage their assortment (routes and times), their allocations (how many routes starting from which locations) and their prices and promotions, all targeted more closely to the profitability of each choice and their customers’ unique desires. (sound familiar yet?). The result: within a year of implementing these new ‘revenue management’ tools, American Air had put People’s Express out of business. Today’s retailers are faced with an equally daunting challenge, both in the form of nimble and exciting upstarts on one end and the all powerful, low-cost provider Wal-Mart on the other. It is only through techniques like Merchandise Optimization that such companies will be able to effectively compete on a differentiated and sustainable basis.

ProfitLogic’s Merchandise Optimization Suite is an innovative approach that utilizes science and applies it to retail. It focuses on the customer and helps manage centrally to execute locally. It manages merchandise across the entire product life cycle. It predicts the impact of a company’s decisions while minimizing risk. ProfitLogic’s performance speaks for itself. In 2002, it created more then $100 million in value to its customers by improving financial and operational methods. With benefits averaging 5-10% gross margin dollar improvements, there is no question as to why so many companies seek ProfitLogic’s solutions. Most importantly, it makes the retailers’ job easier and their businesses more profitable by helping ensure they optimize their returns on their largest investments — inventory and markdowns — while at the same time satisfying their customers.
LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION!

by Heidi Duerrich

Imagine driving over a rattling bridge into a world unlike any you have seen. To each side you see spouting water fountains welcoming you in. Staring back at you are 24 restaurants, shopping stores, and recreational facilities. It could be a dream or maybe it is Waterford Lakes Town Center in Orlando, Florida. It is a new open mall concept developed by the Simon Property Group.

Michael McCarty, President of Simon Property Group Community Development Division spoke of factors that lead to mall development.

Mr. Michael McCarty, President of Simon Property Group Community Development Division spoke of factors that lead to mall development.

at the Retailing Smarter 2003 Symposium. McCarty spoke about five factors that go into developing malls and shopping centers across the nation. Simon Property Group is the largest retail real estate company holding 240 properties in 36 states with a combined 183 million square feet.

The first consideration when developing a property is location cites McCarty. The site must be suitable for development. The relationship to the road network is also important and will ensure traffic to the mall. The site’s proximity is vital for consumer convenience. The strength of competitive retail locations is the final factor affecting location.

The second factor to consider is anchor stores. Anchor stores are the personality of the center. They determine the breadth and depth of the center’s attraction within the marketplace. A bigger market can handle more anchor stores while a smaller market can handle less. The reach and frequency must also be determined. The reach is how far a customer is traveling and the frequency is how often they visit the center. Any barriers that limit travel should also be taken into consideration.

The third factor is the tenant mix. This includes the right mix of goods and services. The tenant mix must complement the anchor stores. They have to be attractive to the consumer if their needs are to be satisfied. The right stores, price points, and goods depend on the consumer and the market.

The fourth factor in development is marketing and promotion. It is imperative to have effective communication with the consumers about the product. This is critical if you want to benefit from the anchor stores and tenant mix.

Finally, the fifth factor is management. Once a customer is at the center, the shopping experience must be efficient and satisfying if the landlord is to capitalize on the product it has created. The maintenance of the center is important. It must look appealing and be secure.

The Waterford Lakes Town Center is a new open mall concept that can be compared to an amusement park. It offers an outdoor food court and Kidlando, a shopping center designed exclusively for kids. This center offers something different in bustling Orlando. With over 1.1 million square feet and a movie theatre complex, there is something to do at all hours.

Given the response of the open air malls, “vanilla malls” may be a thing of the past. Simon Property Group has plans to develop the open-air malls across the country. They are not only convenient for the consumer but a town of its own. When it is caters to the customer, you know it is a Simon Property.

BRINGING THE EXCITEMENT OF NASCAR TO RETAIL

By Staci Shacter

Mark Dyer, Vice President of Licensing and Consumer Products for NASCAR is responsible for bringing the excitement of the NASCAR brand to retail through creative programs and partnerships. Dyer was able to share the thrill of NASCAR races at last months Retail Symposium by beginning his presentation with a cutting edge video. The video showed the enthusiasm of the entire NASCAR experience with hoards of screaming fans attending the races, drivers who are loyal to their fans taking the time to sign autographs, and celebrity involvement with NASCAR such as John Travolta waving the green flag. The video ended with “not just a sport…it’s a lifestyle”.

With NASCAR races claiming 17 of the top 20 largest sporting events in 2002, Mr. Dyer had no problem supporting his brand’s popularity. There are over 75 million fans, 1/3 of the US population are fans, 40% of fans are women, people of all income brackets are NASCAR fans, and most importantly, research shows 83% of the fans are looking for more NASCAR products at retail.

The numbers prove that NASCAR has never been more popular. The drivers have become national celebrities. The product on the track, as well as the way it is delivered on television, has never been better. NASCAR is utilizing cutting edge technology by becoming the first sport to have its own 24-hour channel on XM satellite radio. In 2004, NASCAR plans to unveil a feature-length IMAX movie. Mr. Dyer shared additional clips showing increased media exposure in non traditional channels including the much publicized guest host appearance of Jeff Gordon on Saturday Night Live.

See NASCAR on page 8
Back by popular demand, Dr. Dale Henry, Founder and President of Your Best Unlimited, Inc., spoke again at the Retailing Smarter 2003 Symposium. He has a great ability to speak and keep any crowd interested and begging for more!

Dr. Henry first spoke about customer service. He questioned went into customer service during the twenty-first century. Why are the customers saying “thank you”, while the sellers say “here you go”? Dr. Henry sited that the sellers should be the one saying “thank you”.

If we all take a step back and look at customer service, it seems as if the level of customer service has declined. Dr. Henry shares his experiences at fast food chains, which exemplify signs of poor customer service. He stresses that eye contact is the first and most important step of good customer service. “It’s okay to be wrong and fail, but it’s not okay to not give something a try,” says Henry.

Next, Dr. Henry discussed how most people relate the word “value” to money. Value is what you perceive something to be. Value doesn’t have to be expressed in dollars. The value behind a gift given by a loved one is priceless, although its street value can be less than two dollars. Dr. Henry shared a story about recently receiving a pen from a friend. He valued it because it was from a special friend, but he didn’t realize it was a Montblanc pen valued at over $500! According to Dr. Henry, the Montblanc pen was of no value more than a dollar writing instrument. The dollar value of the pen didn’t mean much to Henry because he did not know the value behind the brand. He valued it because of the friend who gave it to him.

Dr. Henry reminds us to “take aim on what you want to have.” Motivation comes from within. We can’t fix others; we can only fix ourselves. So, Dr. Henry promised us we would leave knowing the first ten president of the United States. He showed us that it is ourselves that prohibit us back from succeeding in gaining this knowledge. After many laughs, he gained the cooperation of over 350 people in the room. He went through a step by step method of learning who these first ten presidents were in such a way that we will never forget. Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Adams, Jackson, Van Buren, Harrison, Tyler…see, it really worked! “We have to believe in ourselves,” says Dr. Henry, “and only you can stop yourself from succeeding.” He continued by reminding everyone to always give it your best! Dr. Henry speaks and trains over 100,000 professionals and executives each year. His clients range from FedEx to Xerox. With his unique ability to captivate all audiences, he has propelled to the top in his speaking career.

Mr. Dyer found the demographics of NASCAR fans to be most intriguing due to many factors. Fans like the family atmosphere of the sport. Fans can cheer for a wide range of drivers both young and old. Fans also respond to their favorite sport by traveling up to 500 miles to watch a race. A symposium participant asked about the most popular drivers and Dyer responded first by saying that even though Dale Earnhart Sr. had passed away, he is still one of the most popular drivers and has one of the highest grossing sales for NASCAR merchandise. Following Earnhart Sr., Jeff Gordon and Dale Earnhart Jr. are the most popular drivers around today.