

Chain Drug Review

Reporter for the Chain Drug Store Industry

IRI event to spotlight shoppers' 'new lens of affordability'

LAS VEGAS — Information Resources Inc.'s (IRI's) Summit 2009 will "disrupt thinking," according to Thom Blischok, IRI's president of consulting and innovation.

"We're trying to help people understand the kinds of actions that companies are taking to fundamentally compete differently in this economic environment," says Blischok.

The conference, taking place from March 23 through March 25 at the Wynn Las Vegas, reflects IRI's attentiveness to consumer packaged goods (CPG) and retail executives' professional and personal needs in an extraordinary time, he says.

Networking time will be boosted to expand attendees' opportunities to share ideas and best practices. "The agenda is not just about company success, but about individual success," Blischok says.

The summit's business program will cover such pressing topics as how to

engineer shopper loyalty, rethink pricing and promotions, and redesign and redefine assortments. It will be rich in case studies, Blischok notes.

Attendees will also be challenged to rethink shopper insights and use them as a strategic weapon. "We want people at the conference to understand the competitive landscape from the shopper's perspective — not necessarily just from the CPG or retail perspective," says Blischok. "Shoppers are viewing things from a new lens of affordability, and we want attendees to understand where consumers are shopping and why."

Excitement is building over the speakers lineup and the content and relevance of their material, he adds.

Discussions will range from a talk on innovation by consultant and author Ram Charan to an economic outlook from Forbes editor-in-chief Steve Forbes to a roundtable of "mommy bloggers" to retail and CPG perspectives.

"This is the first conference I've seen in a long while that's really addressing the day-to-day needs of the CPG or retail individual who is trying to reset the economics of competition," Blischok says.

"This is a very serious conference at a very serious time," he adds. "And from an issue of content we have made it pretty spectacular."

While he maintains that there is no silver bullet for dealing with the recession, "there is a combination of silver bullets, and we are trying to address pretty much every one."

The goal is to have attendees return to their companies and test at least a few new ideas, Blischok adds.

The summit's overarching objectives are to have attendees "listen and learn, question their organizations' thinking and take action," he comments. "This is a conference where not being there could have a direct impact on one's success."