

Township store spices things up in Marianhill, KwaZulu-Natal

Checkout caters for its customers

BY ANELLE HAMILTON

CHECKOUT Supermarket in Marianhill, KwaZulu-Natal operates in a poverty-stricken community devastated by unemployment. The majority of its customers are dependant on grants and welfare payouts to make ends meet. Despite these challenges, however, the store has managed to perform better year-on-year and landed itself in the top three of the Checkout group, which is a member of Shield. The store's success in a tough consumer environment can be attributed to the fact that it caters for the specific needs of its target market. Farouk Peer, the store manager, is also a firm believer in investing in his employees, who are made up almost entirely of locals. By training them and motivating them to become multi-skilled and work their way up in the store, he plays a big role in uplifting the community.

The store

"We are the only supermarket in the area and although there is a wholesaler around the corner we offer a one-stop shop with a butchery and bakery," says Beverly Mallanna, who is the assistant store manager and head buyer. She joined the company seven years ago as a cashier and worked her way up to front-end controller before she was promoted to the cash office. "Today I am thankful that I had to start at the bottom and work my way up. I know all the departments and can assist and supervise everyone in the store," she says.

Both managers are fluent in Zulu, which is a great advantage, as many of the customers



Store manager Farouk Peer and assistant store manager and head buyer, Beverly Mallanna, are both fluent in Zulu, which helps a lot as some of their customers cannot speak English.

The store has managed to perform better year-on-year.

do not speak English. This also helps in building a good relationship with them and shows mutual respect.

The Checkout group opened the store ten years ago in the Madari's Centre after buying out a Pick n Pay franchisee. It operates in an area with high unemployment and is surrounded by low cost development housing that is mushrooming by the day. The customer base consists of a mix of young couples, school kids and older people. Most



Above: Mpho Moloi runs the spice bar where customers can select a variety of spices for the stews and curries.



Right: The entrance to the supermarket in the busy Madari shopping centre.

of the customers do not have their own transport and walk to the shop or use taxis.

Rather than have ebb and flow of traffic, the store is busy all the time, although it does peak at weekends.

"We opened a post office in the store, which has been hugely beneficial as it draws in the crowds. The store is packed on the days when social grants are paid out. We also installed the first Absa ATM in the area and

our customers feel much safer drawing their money in the store," says Peer.

The departments

The fruit and vegetable department features a spice bar where customers can select a variety of spices for their stews and curries. Mpho Moloi runs this department and she is a shining example of the shop's in-house training programme. She started working as

The bakery is a hive of activity when the schools are out. Items such as snowballs and doughnuts sell like hot cakes!



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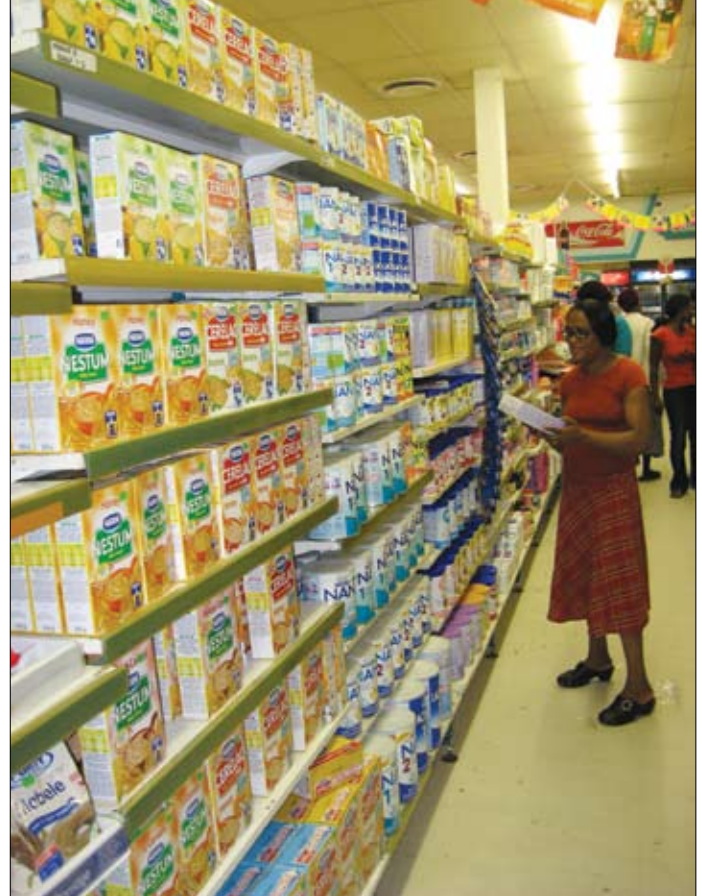
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Clear signage inside the store shows customers where to find what they're looking for.



The baby product aisle is very popular, as many young families live in the area.

a packer and showed she had huge potential. "We nurtured her and trained her and today this is one of our star departments in the store," says Peer.

He buys his fresh produce from a local farmer, rather than the market, in an effort to support local producers.

The bakery is a hive of activity and staff members work hard to keep up with the demand. Bread is baked off-site and delivered, but items such as doughnuts, éclairs and cakes are baked fresh daily. Items that are not sold are marked down the next day and fly off the shelves. "Phillip Kwela, the head baker, runs a tight ship and has a set schedule for the day. He is also in charge of stock control,



He buys his fresh produce from a local farmer, rather than the market, in an effort to support local producers.



which minimises shrinkage and wastage," says Peer. There are many large schools in the area and the school kids love the doughnuts and snowballs that are the bakery's top sellers.

"Our cakes are very popular – especially on special occasions. On Mother's Day hundreds of people queued and we sold out very quickly. We also get in many orders from customers for cakes for parties and weddings," says Mallanna.

The butchery has been adapted to cater for the community, with a mix of cheaper and more expensive items. The cheaper items include tripe and chicken feet, while steak and mince are a bit more expensive. Thandi, one

The shop and the till points are busy the whole day.



Promotional participation is very high and posters displaying competitions are featured in every department.



Bread is baked off-site and delivered, while items such as doughnuts, éclairs and cakes are baked fresh daily.

of the managers, is a qualified block lady and the store has invested in a generator to cope with all the recent power outages.

"The baby product aisle is very popular. A lot of our customers have babies and toddlers and the nappies, formula and cereals sell out quickly. Our cosmetic section is also doing well. Although our customers do not earn much, they do not mind spending their money on items such as hair relaxer, deodorant and body lotions. And the men always opt for the more expensive products," says Mallanna.

Peer has noticed that his customers have

Checkout has a selection of Own Brand products.



changed their shopping habits in light of the tough economic climate at the moment. Shoppers are buying smaller quantities - for example, where they used to purchase a 50kg bag of maize, they are now buying 20kg bags. Top selling items are (in no particular order): maize; rice; vegetables; bread; canned items; and baby products.

Promotions

Promotional participation here is high, as customers are very price conscious and are always looking for a good deal.

While *Supermarket & Retailer* was visiting the store, their 32nd anniversary promotion was underway. "December is always our best month and we do very well with our back-to-school promotions in January," says Mallanna.

Awarded for excellence

The store recently won Store of the Year 2007, while Farouk Peer also received a special award for outstanding Achievement and Excellence for 2007 from the Checkout group at an award ceremony in August. In a challenging environment, this store has found a recipe for success. ■

FACTBOX:

Checkout Supermarket, Marianhill, KZN

Size: 7 500m² (trading area)

Till points: 12

Permanent staff: 60

Casuals: 15

Opening hours: Mon-Fri: 08:30 - 18:00,

Sunday: 08:00 - 14:00

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