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**ICBA COVID-19 Calls: Summary from April 1-2, 2020**

**Operations / Staffing**

With only a few exceptions, all stores were closed to the public. In many cases, stores are considered essential services and are permitted to fulfill online orders and offer curbside pick-up using appropriate safety measures (limited personnel in store, limited rotating crews). A few stores are not currently allowed to fulfill online orders. Some stores with multiple locations reported moving inventory to a “main store location” to streamline order fulfillment from one location.

Institutions varied quite a bit on personnel policies, including those stores that operate under a separate 501-(c)(3) or other corporation designation. Some institutions require specific reporting related to “COVID-19” hours. Some are paying students for a limited period of time; some have eliminated all but essential student employees (web/social media/marketing). Several managers were waiting on additional campus guidelines regarding store personnel whose positions were not able to function on an at-home basis (transactional staff, merchandisers, etc.).

For those with staff Working From Home (WFH), managers are seeking ways to keep employees connected (conference calling, town halls, virtual hangouts) and productive (special projects, webinars, professional development), in addition to other functions that can be completed from a home set-up.

Campus IT departments are focused on giving faculty priority tech support. Store personnel are adjusting to learning new tools and technology not previously used.

**Shipping/Receiving**

* Having good relationships with UPS and FedEX drivers has been key for some stores. In some cases, alternate arrangements have been made with other campus entities: sending deliveries to campus main receiving, coordination with post office for receiving, even deliveries to staff home address (small town). Some reported UPS and FedEX “holding packages” until reopening or scheduling only on limited days for deliveries.
* One manager provided local delivery to students to much delight!

**Special Projects**

* Building out website for more products available for online sales
* Website refresh
* SKU maintenance
* Conducted annual inventory with limited staff with appropriate distancing in place (Iowa State)
* Professional development using available webinars, Excel tutorials, and educational content available through vendor partners
* Updating/creating Standard Operations Procedures
* University of Dayton has added “LIVE CHAT” feature to its website to provide a more intimate experience
* Wichita State store is acting as an emergency consolidation point for accepting donations of PPE for local medical facilities and first responders.

**Marketing & eCommerce**

Most stores are trying to strike the right balance of sending purely informational message vs. sales-oriented messages that could be perceived negatively by some. Some stores guided by institution or have made decision to deliver only essential operational information through social media outlets. Some reporting campus has asked them to go “dark” on social media. Some can email to their student mailing lists.

* Web banners with essential COVID-19 store info and links to campus info. Building COVID-19 FAQ page.
* E-Gift cards (reported as available for use online at most but not all large schools)
* Virtual Sidewalk Sales events, Flash Sales events, Discounts/Clearance across GM categories
* If unable to fulfill online orders, some stores have shifted to profile/highlight store personnel working from home, included their pets!
* Mannequin photo shoots with “We Miss You” messaging
* Keeping it fun and quirky – I go to ACC but it Feels like Home
* FB contests to drive traffic to online store
* Focus for some stores on essential supplies and tech product
* NCSU: Using “Wolfpack Family” motto to build a sense of community
* Free Shipping on all orders or some with certain size orders – some as low as $25
* Free Shipping for .edu emails
* Free Shipping with #StayHome promo code
* Discounts or Special Offers; recommended to keep it relatable to showing campus spirit or working from home.
* Celebrating Grads
* Marketing Apple products
* Spike in hoodies and sweatpants – cozy outfits trending
* Increase in online tech product sales
* Accommodating some dropships from distributors or manufacturers but mainly a manual process
* Financial AID issues for some online orders
* Partnering with athletics for rebroadcast of past games with the store offering promotions to support this idea.
* The “new normal” will likely accelerate demand/expectation for Free Shipping
* Fear of loss of incremental sales as more course materials shift to online solutions

**GM Buying Cycle**

Some stores are working on delaying vendor shipments and requesting delayed payment or extended payment terms. Some that have not yet cancelled orders expressed concerns that vendor partners may not be able to respond to built-up demand and production for July/August deliveries. Several expressed caution in ordering for fall due to uncertainty of class start up, enrollments, or campus-wide events.

With cancellation of the basketball season, some stores inordinately high in inventory. Some concerns with institution mandating significant oversight on even inventory for resale (cash flow issues).

Some strategies focus on core basics rather than fashion assortments.

**Grad Ceremonies**

No one appears to be going forward with May/June grad ceremonies. Usually a campus committee makes the final decision on alternative ceremonies or virtual event. Some institutions may provide “commencement package” of regalia, diploma frame, etc, in lieu of event with the bookstore helping to support whatever outcome decided.

Some stores reported continued demand for “souvenir” celebration product for photos and commemoration. Working with regalia companies on disposition of rentals and one-trippers/keepers.

**Course Materials**

* Asking for leniency with wholesale returns. Becoming more aggressive on returns. Verifying that publishers are open to receive inbound returns from the store.
* Concerns about fall enrollments due to unemployment; some estimates at 25% below LY
* Shift to online learning creates uncertainty regarding physical book demand for fall semester/quarter.
* Concerns about texts with no e-book alternative
* Confusion on how to access eBooks
* Brainstorming on how to incorporate trade books in virtual curriculum
* Tracking “free” materials as part of affordability demonstration using VitalSource and RedShelf offerings

**CM Rental Returns and BuyBacks**

* Smaller campuses coordinating with Residence Director to assist in rental returns with labeling and drop-offs
* Library rental drop-off with appropriate forms
* External drop box by bookstore
* Expense concerns about issuing call tags for rental returns
* Extending rental return deadline some as late as September 1
* Offering rent-to-buy option
* Differing opinions on rental inventory disposition; some preferring to hold on to inventory for fall, others preferring to return as much as possible.
* Many opting for online buybacks to wholesalers only
	+ Consider asking wholesalers to “reserve” quantities for select titles brought in through wholesale buyback
	+ Consider adjusting wholesale commissions to encourage online buybacks
* Considering on doing in-store buyback when campus reopens

**General Comments**

Concerns about reopening procedures; counter service only, limiting number of customers in store, safety precautions for frontline staff and store sanitation.

Closing comments from Bryan Tuten from East Carolina’s Dowdy Student Stores: *“Realize this is a worldwide problem, have faith we will get through it. This year may not be very good but put things in perspective!”*