One Bowl of Cheerios at a Time

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Mine is a household of two so, for us, bigger is usually not better.

When we approached the home-buying process recently, we were looking for something we could live in comfortably, but without a bunch of unneeded space. With this in mind, we opted for a two-bedroom cottage with a large backyard and proximity to our favorite areas of the city.

The idea of downsizing, I think, is intended to make people's lives easier. Whoever said this didn't have the 100-square-foot kitchen I have. So when specifyiing our new appliances, we were subject to searching far and wide for a refrigerator described as "European" sized. Thanks to LG, we were finally able to find an option that offers 10.5 cubic feet of cooling and freezing combination on its lanky, narrow stainless steel frame, which fits snugly in our small galley kitchen. This refrigerator can hold more than enough food, but effectively eliminates the option of some larger drink bottles and food items. Let's just say watermelon-smashing comedian Gallagher is not a frequent house guest.

The refrigerator we bought also means we shop on a more regular basis, and must overcome the urge to take advantage of the volume discounts that beckon from every bend and crevice of the grocery store. I can't underscore just how difficult this habit is to break — when we see two-for-ones, buy-one-get-ones or blow-outs on giant jars of grape jam, we simply have to walk away. It's a great deal — until you're throwing away six ears of dried-up sweet corn because the 10 for $2 special grabbed your grocery cart and wouldn't let go.

During a recent interview with Fastenal president Will Oberton, we got to talking about inventory management — specifically Fastenal's wheelhouse in this area,

which is on-premise industrial vending. Though not brand-spanking-new technology, Oberton is excited about its future in the industrial marketplace. He explained it thusly, from a consumer standpoint:

"It would be no different than if your favorite grocery store came to you and said ‘We're going to put a refrigerator and a pantry in your house, we're going to stock it with all of your favorite products, and when you pour the Cheerios into the bowl, we charge you for it.’ Most of us would go for a service like that in the busy world we live in."

I'll tell you one thing: I sure would. It would most certainly keep me from over-purchasing and, worse, winding up tossing product in the trash. And Oberton's message carries a special ring in the manufacturing sector. How many "bowls of Cheerios" do you have, stacked on the shelves, waiting to be consumed? Feel free to replace the word Cheerios with something that hits a little closer to home — adhesives, cleaning supplies, personal protection equipment or any of the other consumables that take a big dent out of your budget: How much of this product did you buy based on volume pricing, only to find it is past its expiration date by the time you get around to using it?

The issue here is about finding a way to get what you need *and* make it cost-effective. While this sounds like a classic case of easier said than done, that would overlook the push we've seen in recent years by suppliers to target inventory management solutions in these key areas for their customers. Many in the industrial distribution space have taken huge strides in developing customer-focused programs that keep their end-users from throwing away ears of corn, so to speak.

And until there is a world, like Oberton describes, where my grocer can manage my food fulfillment process, I guess I'll just have to manage on my own. But for those of you in the industrial market, the technology is there ... What are you waiting for?

What’s your take? Sound off by emailing me at anna.wells@advantagemedia.com *[1].*

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