

Ahold Launches Image Bank

By JON SPRINGER

SKOKIE, Ill. — A co-founder of the Peapod Internet grocery has launched a new venture providing retailers with free high-quality product images and information for use in e-commerce applications, circulars and planograms.

The new company, ItemMaster, is already providing images and product data for all new items to the Peapod.com website and for Ahold's U.S. retail banners. It is expected to announce a partnership with MyWebGrocer that would provide retail clients of

Parkinson said he was inspired to create an "open-exchange" of product images and data after encountering inconsistent quality and supply issues while building Peapod's e-commerce Web application. Parkinson co-founded Peapod with his brother, Andrew, in 1989.

He said the service would save Ahold about \$500,000 annually.

"Most vendors are charging the retailer, and the manufacturer gets off scot-free," explained Parkinson. "We are switching the model around, asking manufactur-

ers are uniform in the standard angle and plunge depths as specified by GS1 code, Parkinson explained.

ItemMaster had about 3,000 items in its database last week, and is adding some 500 new products every week, he said. It plans to have 50,000 products in the database by the end of the year.

These images can have increasing importance in e-commerce applications providing more robust product information including nutritional information and ingredients, Parkinson said. Photos of the same product from multiple angles can also be stitched into three-dimensional images for use on Internet sites or planograms.

"Manufacturers are becoming aware now that the digital version of their product has to be accurate, or they leave themselves open for litigation," he said. "If you have peanuts in your product and the image doesn't show visually that there are peanuts in the product, that can be a problem."

Around half of the product manufacturers had warmed to the idea of ItemMaster, Parkinson said, but added that additional retailers using the system would make more converts as time went on. He said the system could save manufacturers money over the long term by outsourcing their product photos and maintaining an accurate and up-to-date library of images and product data.

"We are switching the model around, asking manufacturers to pay so retailers can use [the images] for free."

*THOMAS PARKINSON
founder, Peapod*

that service with free product images, Thomas Parkinson, ItemMaster's founder, told SN in an exclusive interview last week. ItemMaster and Peapod are subsidiaries of Ahold.

Typically, Parkinson said, retailers have paid vendors a licensing fee for use of product images. ItemMaster seeks to change the model by shifting the cost to manufacturers. Product providers can upload images to the ItemMaster database for free or have them photographed and prepared for publication by ItemMaster at its studio here for a fee.

ers to pay a reasonable rate for all retailers to be able to use them for free."

ItemMaster's studio features a proprietary camera system known as the "producer," which uses a turntable and robotic camera arms to shoot nine photographs of every product in less than five minutes per shoot. Each shoot produces "glamour shots" for circulars, planogram images for shelf management, e-commerce images and complete package data including nutrition and ingredients. The system assures that all pho-