

Pride of Quebec

Provigo's modest make-over marvels customers of Quebec's largest grocery retailer

By Claire Sykes, Contributor

Below: Provigo's motto, "si vite, si bon" (so quick, so good) in raised letters helps delineate the produce department.



It's easy to wow people with a new store design when the budget is bountiful. But what about when funds are fixed?

Such was the case with Provigo Inc., Quebec's largest grocery retailer with 100 stores throughout the province. The 36-year-old Canadian chain, a division of Loblaw Companies Limited, the country's largest grocery distributor, needed to update its image to impress customers, without spending a lot of money. Provigo did just that when it revamped its company logo, splashed some color on the walls and hung up a varied array of photographic-lifestyle signage. The result is stores that customers can't help but notice as fresher and livelier, yet warm and inviting as ever.

"There's no sense of great detail or wonderfully complex environmental solutions, but in the end it has terrific impact," says Joe Jackman, chairman and chief creative officer of Perennial Inc., the retail marketing and design firm in Toronto that worked with Provigo to arrive at the make-over.

The new, contemporary look is quite a switch from

Provigo's old, outdated one. Until all of its stores are revamped, dark hues and cluttered visual merchandising will continue to dominate most of the company's 10,000-to-40,000-sq.-ft. stores. Although there have been successive waves of renovations—with the last one about 15 years ago—there has been no consistency among them, says Jackman. But all that will change as the refurbishing gradually gets rolled out to the remaining locations.

Provigo naturally turned to Perennial, which has enjoyed a decade-long relationship with Loblaw. In December 2003, the two sat down and discussed the retailer's goals: to employ flexible design solutions adaptable to variations among all the locations, and differentiate themselves from other neighboring grocery stores. The strategy called for re-embracing the idea of the small store that focuses on making meals as quick, convenient and delicious as possible for time-pressed customers.

In spring 2004, Provigo began experimenting with the concept at three of its Montreal stores, chosen for their variations in size and condition. "These live

explorations helped us understand what design elements would work and what wouldn't," says Jackman. "Just as important, we were testing the value of the design, how much of a difference to customers the solution would make."

Store inconsistencies meant they couldn't expect, from site to site, any similarity among size, fixtures or sightlines. Meanwhile, a limited budget challenged them to pursue the biggest bang for their buck for their corporate store managers and independent franchisees. He continues, "We had to be very selective about how we spent money, considering less expensive options whenever we could. So where we had the choice to use wall color, for example, we did that, instead of using more elaborate devices to create a sense of décor." To further save cost, Provigo made no changes to refrigeration and plumbing systems, or lighting, flooring or ceilings, "unless we absolutely had to," says Jackman.

By fall 2004, Perennial had refined its approach at the three test sites and applied it to a single, Dorval,



Left: Part of Provigo's fresh new color scheme includes deep blue walls in the seafood department.

Below: Interior signage offers simple, strong graphic solutions that create an impact.

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— Jim King, Perennial



Quebec, store, which was completed at year's end. At all four of these locations, customers are now greeted by a revamped logo, for starters. Perennial restyled the old one's lower case lettering, then added orange, green and yellow leaves to the graphic floral mark and moved that from one end of the wording to the other. It also painted the exterior of the building white instead of its traditional red. "Red is always difficult to manage, as ultraviolet rays tend to turn it pink," says Jim King, executive vice president and co-chief creative officer at Perennial.

Inside, dreary yellowish walls were brightened by a series of fresh colors, each one identifying a different department around the perimeter, "to create impact and a sense of change," says Jackman. Green and white are for produce, yellow for dairy, blue for seafood, and taupe for frozen foods and other areas.

The company's interior signage offers "simple, strong graphic solutions that really command a space and project a feeling, and yet there's nothing expensive about them," he continues.

A 6-ft. by 55-ft. MDF panel serves as a divider between produce and grocery—with Provigo's motto, "si vite, si bon" (so quick, so good)—in raised Sintra (PVC plastic foam) letters for depth and dimension, and laminated photos of happy people and healthful foods. "It creates a more distinct zone by closing off the view of the rest of the store around the produce and so-called fresh areas," says King. Elsewhere in the store, equally large signage with similar lifestyle graphics heralds the logo of Loblaw's private-label brand, President's Choice.

MDF laminated signs—again with motto and photos, measuring 3 ft. by 12 ft., hang above the deli department in orange and in home meal replacement in blue and yellow. Similarly designed 42-in. by 59-in. paper signs are suspended above the store aisles. Referring to all interior signage, King says, "We wanted to make a dominant impression by surrounding customers with fresh messages on quality meal suggestions."

Around the store, smaller President's Choice signage

and attractive, ever-changing displays of grocery items complete the visual impact, with an encore in the produce department by two 6-ft. by 6-ft. red and yellow canvas umbrellas. Beneath them, new fluorescent lighting spotlights fruits and vegetables.

Where deli and refrigeration cases were concerned, Provigo repainted the dark wood fascia of the old ones, replaced them with a maple veneer, or brought in entirely new off-white fixtures. The existing floors, already light in color, were left alone if in good condition. Otherwise, 1-ft.-square, gray vinyl tiles were laid in the produce and fresh departments, with beige and white elsewhere, "giving a much lighter and brighter appearance to the whole store," says King.

Along with making comments such as, "so much fresher" and, "it feels like a happier place," many customers have remarked that the stores look larger, even though they're not. "Provigo is an institution in Quebec; it has a great heritage in the industry," says King. "So it's really nice to have this new identity for them. It seems to be doing very well." 