

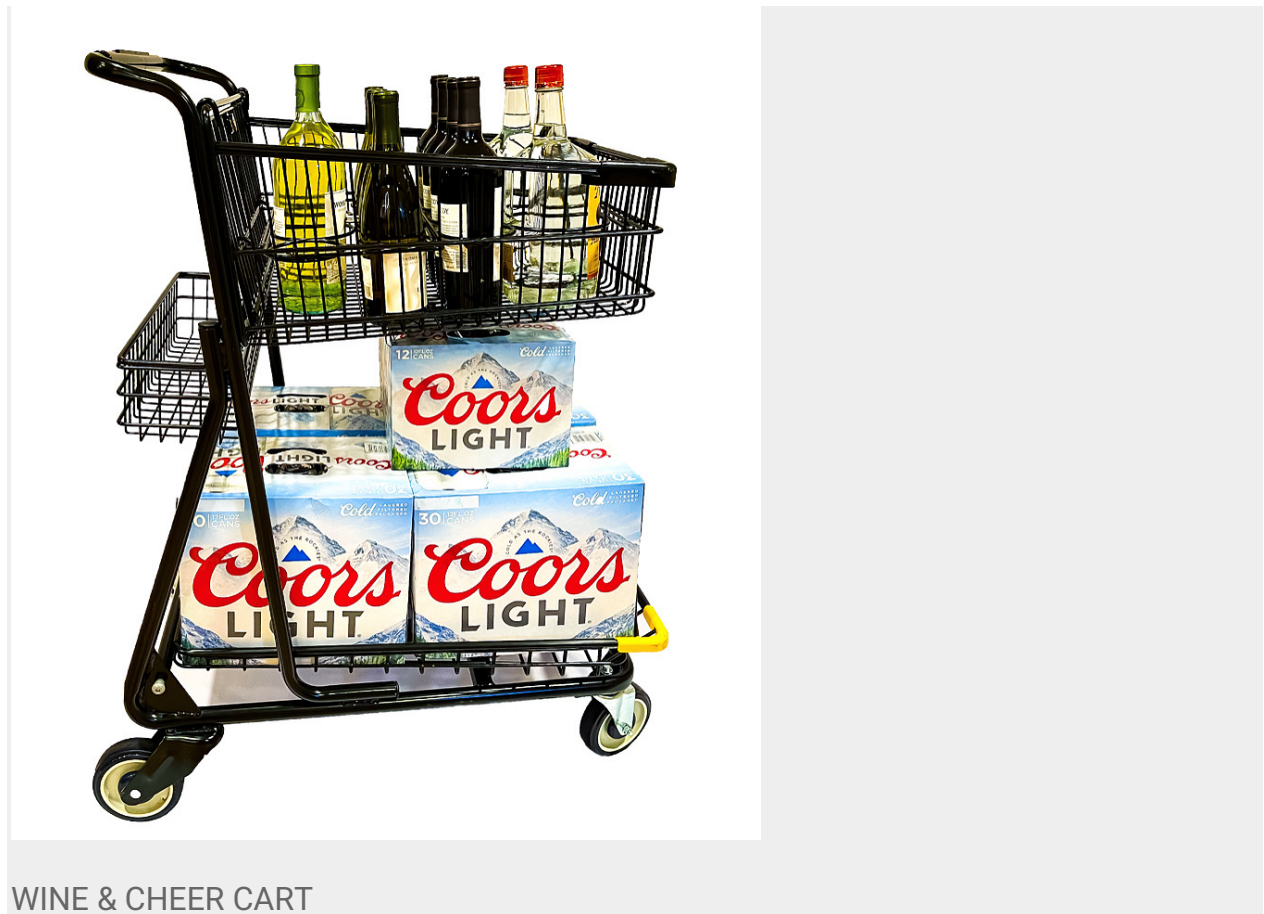
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Rolling stock

A cart designed for liquor stores keeps clinking to a minimum

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WINE & CHEER CART

A Wyckoff insurance agent and stay-at-home-mom couple who moonlight as inventors won a patent earlier this year for a shopping cart made especially for wine bottles. Tom and Charlotte Santolli received their second patent for the Wine & Cheer Cart, leveling up from a design patent, which protects an item's appearance, to a utility patent, which protects the item's functions.

The first patent came in 2019 two years after Charlotte made a comment to Tom after a trip to the wine shop. "She came home from Bottle King in 2016 or 17, and she said 'you know how the cupholder they have for a cup outside the cart? They should make one for

the wine inside the cart,” Tom Santolli recounted. “A light went off. I Googled for two hours.”

The Santollis found that of the maybe two dozen shopping cart manufacturers in the world, not one had invented a cart specifically for wine. After designing and prototyping, the Santollis put their carts to the test at a handful of stores in New Jersey and Indiana in December 2019 and January 2020.

The results were better than they’d ever expected.

“If you’re a liquor store owner, you always want a customer to take a cart because a cart sale averages two-and-a-half to three times more than a non-cart order. Someone who doesn’t take a cart will walk out with three bottles or less,” Tom said. “And the Bottle King store tested that, 109 buyers came out with three bottles.”

At Big Red Liquors in Indianapolis, the average non-cart ticket size in January 2020 was \$34.87. Carted customers bought \$104.40 in beverages. At the Bloomington, Ind. location, average ticket size without a cart was \$26.61; with a cart it was \$88.79. And for stores that already had carts of some kind, the Wine & Cheer cart was used three times more often than the other carts.

“Grocery carts in the liquor stores create customer reluctance. They don’t want the bottles rolling around clinking, so they don’t take them. So, what does that mean? Store owners are limiting their buyers to three bottles. It’s all about getting the customer to take a cart, and we absolutely crushed them. Nobody likes to have to lay the bottles down and listen to them all rollover,” he said.



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Clinking aside, Santolli cited The Zeigarnik Effect as a reason Wine & Cheer carts are better than traditional carts. Named after Soviet psychologist Bluma Zeigarnik, the effect describes a phenomenon whereby an activity that has been interrupted may be more readily recalled. It postulates that people remember unfinished or interrupted tasks better than completed tasks, and that they desire to finish said tasks. Zeigarnik first published information on the effect in 1927.

With Wine & Cheer, The Zeigarnik Effect is used to influence purchasing behavior by creating intentional focus on the uncompleted task of filling open rings, Santolli said. A similar thought occurred to grocery store owner Sylvan Goldman when he invented the shopping cart 84 years ago. Goldman, who owned several grocery stores in Oklahoma City in the first half of the twentieth century, noticed that his customers would leave his stores once their hands were full.

After tinkering around with ideas on how move more product, he was awarded a patent for the shopping cart in 1940. And after early adoption challenges, the carts caught on.

The Santollis updated Wine & Cheer to make room for cases of beer on the bottom and larger liquor bottles on the backside. Now, they're faced with other challenges, too: the cost to ship the carts in from their overseas manufacturer is sky-high due to record container shipping prices —more than \$26,000 per container, compared to approximately \$6,000 per container this time last year. And before they can get consumers to adopt wine cart use, store owners need to get into them enough to buy them from the Santollis and put them in their stores.

"The women get it. Whenever I have a husband-and-wife liquor store owner, the wives get it. I don't know why, but they do," Santolli said.

Last year, Wine & Cheer won a contract from Pennsylvania to supply carts to its state-run liquor stores. But Pennsylvania needed the carts in six weeks, and the Santollis were unable to supply that many so quickly, forcing them to pass on the opportunity. He said other opportunities are emerging, though, including with Midwestern manufacturer of Target's signature red carts. He has high hopes.

"Ultimately it's going to become a forced buy for liquor stores. When they start seeing the competitor down the street is going to get it, they're going to get it. It takes time for them to see the vision," Santolli said. "Our cart will help them sell more, but people [look at] cost rather than revenue."

For now, the cart is available for use in several stores in New Jersey, Indiana, Delaware, Connecticut. Stores here include ShopRite Liquors in Hillsdale and Lyndhurst; Mason Cellars in Rutherford; Ramsey Liquors in Ramsey; and Super Cellars in Ridgewood.