

Petrol PLAZA

"The Netherlands is a very innovative market" Interview with Mark Wohltmann

We speak to Mark Wohltmann, Director of NACS Europe, about the upcoming NACS Convenience Summit Europe, 5 - 7 June, London, and Market Tours Europe, 9 - 11 June, Amsterdam.



NACS Convenience Summit tour in Warsaw, Poland

Prior to NACS, Mark worked with the Nielsen Company, where he held the position of Director Product Management Europe. NACS, founded August 14, 1961, is an international trade association representing more than 2,100 retail and 1,600 supplier company members.

NACS Convenience Summit Europe has been a two-part event taking place part in London and another European city. Can you tell us about the new concept for 2019?

The Convenience Summit itself is a 2-day conference plus a day of store tours and has been in London for over 20 years. Over the years the summit attracted more and more senior leaders from beyond Europe and they wanted to make the most of the trip, so they usually stay longer than just 2 days. We then started to add another city connected to the event, focusing on store tours in a

different city every year. This has become so successful in itself that we decided to decouple both events, the 2 day summit in London on Wed/Thu (with store tours on Friday) and a 2 day Market Tour in Amsterdam the Monday/Tuesday the following week. This gives European delegates the opportunity to return home for the weekend while international delegates can make the most out of their trip.

What are the key benefits for retailers and suppliers when attending these events? If a company cannot attend the two, how can they best decide which one to take part in?

Attending events like this, is always about three things: Best practice, thought leadership and network. The Market Tour is all about best practice: two packed days on the road in our host city to see as many convenience stores, foodservice outlets and petrol stations as possible. The London summit is all about thought leadership: high profile speakers that will elaborate on current and future industry issues, the big disruptors and solutions on how to advance our industry. Both events are, of course, about networking. NACS International operates events like these, especially designed for senior executives of our industry to meet, learn and network across countries. No other event brings together a group that senior whilst at the same time being fully focused on convenience and fuel retailing.

London traditionally offers an ambitious, wide-ranging conference program that explores trends from the present and future. What will be the key topics and some of the highlights of this year's edition?

We regularly ask several hundred of our most senior members "what keeps you awake at night" to determine the global strategic industry issues that will then also be covered at the summit. This year will focus on the electrification of mobility with the European EV association and speakers from Norway. We will have two panels with Millennials who will tell us what they think about us... and why they work in our industry. And we will of course cover foodservice, payment systems, digital disruption of loyalty programs and, the very burning topic, not just in our industry: Plastics - the good and the bad.

In 2017, a newly built Spar Natural store in the Canary Islands was crowned NACS International Convenience Retailer of the Year for its investment in healthy food, bio products and educational programs. Last year it was 'Fresh, The Good Food Market' from Dublin that took the price, mainly due to its focus on foodservice. What can we expect from the year's finalists?

Well, I can't comment on the winner yet... But once again we did get many entries from amazing stores. And we have entries from The Americas, Europe and Asia. Just by looking at the entries and finalists, I am stunned by the power of innovation in our industry.

Let's talk about NACS Market Tour Europe. This year you are heading to Amsterdam. The Dutch market is characterised for being highly innovative. National players such as Albert

Heijn have been at the forefront of reimagining convenience. What have you learned about his market while doing the research for the Tour?

As you said, the market is highly innovative and we already saw plenty of innovation and best practice. I think the highlights to expect are:

Serious about food: We will see how retailers, small and large, not just incorporate foodservice but make it a focal point of their offer. Or to use the words of a Dutch petrol retailer: "We are not a petrol station with a c-store... we are a restaurant with a petrol pump"

Selling to Gen Z despite being a brand: We will learn how the next generation shops and how you market your brand to cater to a group that dislikes brands.

Going cashless - the new way of retailing: We will visit outlets where especially younger consumers "ditch the cash." We will see how retailers react and learn how this completely changes on-site operations. We will also learn why "cash is dirty" and how this can actually be a selling point to go cashless.

Full-service is back - including the experience factor: We will experience a patented full-service fuelling lane. Sit back, relax, the conveyor belt will take you to the next level of a comfortable fuelling experience.

Service as a profit center: We will hear from retailers that innovated, improved, broke even and now make profit with in-petrol-station-laundromats, dog-wash, flower shops, barbers, ...

Multiple coffee stops multiply profit: We will follow the daily journey of the coffee-junky and see how it pays off to offer a branded coffee-house experience, an own-brand quick-serve coffee point, vending and the good old "plain black" - all at the same site.

Convenience - more than just a c-store: We will find convenience - and consumers embracing it - in likely and unlikely places: Hot Dogs sales next to suitcases, hot-food-vending on the high street and high-sugar-indulgence in a healthy-food-store.

What food on-the-go products are the best sellers at Dutch convenience stores?

Herring & Cheese... No, just kidding. Both are quintessentially Dutch and can be found in many places. But the Dutch convenience-cuisine is far more diverse than that. Today you can still find links to food from places along the ancient maritime trading routes and at the same time, you'll find all the modern food developments like Sushi, free-from and vegan. My favourite though is the custom-made doughnut from Dunkin'.

In terms of fuel stations, what can visitors expect to see in the Amsterdam area?

We will see the largest site in the Netherlands, the newest site, a site that claims to be a "bistro with fuel, not a fuel station with shop"..., a patented, automated fuelling lane where the car moves forward on a conveyor belt, a laundromat, flower shop, barber and dog wash... all at a petrol station. And

much more. As mentioned before, it's a really innovative market.