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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (draft for review)

Assortment Planning Focus of Columbus Consulting Two-day Retail Conference in New York City

Dale Achabal headlines first Columbus Consulting conference

CHICAGO (RETAIL SYSTEMS 2006) – May 22, 2006 – Columbus Consulting, Inc. (CCI), a leading retail consulting firm, today announced that it will be hosting a two-day retail management conference entitled, “Assortment Planning: The Holy Grail of Retail,” in New York City on September 13-14, 2006. The keynote speaker for the event will be Dale Achabal, a leading retail industry expert, director of the Retail Management Institute and the Retail Workbench Research & Education Center, and the L.J. Skaggs Distinguished Professor and Associate Dean for Research & Development at Santa Clara University. Jon Beck, CCI principal and an authority on assortment planning, will host a series of industry experts for this premiere educational event.

The conference speakers and program tracks will be tailored to retail managers, senior managers, directors and executives who are currently responsible for assortment planning and allocation, merchandising, purchasing and data management. For those interested in participating in the conference, please visit the conference Web site at www.columbusconsultinginc.com or email info@cbusinc.com.

Columbus Consulting has compiled a full two days of speakers and presentations that will help educate attendees about a number of issues related to assortment planning, as well as provide active forums for discussions among retailers and industry experts. The overall themes of the conference will include:

- Benefits of improving assortment planning practices;
- Current trends in assortment planning processes
- Leveraging science to enhance merchandising decisions
- Synchronizing with merchandise planning, space planning, and allocation;
- Case studies;
- Challenges in managing implementation projects; and
- Leveraging data warehouse investments to support assortment planning.

“Assortment planning truly is the holy grail of retail, and we have assembled a world-class group of speakers and presenters that will help retailers ‘crack’ the assortment planning code, as well provide a snapshot of successful assortment planning projects,” said Rick Amari, president of Columbus Consulting. “As we work with retailers across the country, assortment planning continues to be one of the most misunderstood and under-appreciated components of the retail merchandising process. Through this conference, we hope to provide our attendees with a volume of information and strategies that can help them to better understand the assortment planning process and begin to take steps to implement assortment planning initiatives that can dramatically improve their bottom line. We are excited to have Dale Achabal as our keynote speaker, and look forward to working with the retail industry to make this a very successful conference.”

The conference will be divided into two tracks. The first day's speakers and presenters will focus upon management and process issues, while the second day will focus upon practical applications and subject matter. In addition to the conference tracks and speakers, there will be a Vendor Exhibition that will allow attendees to preview the latest software offerings from a variety of assortment planning solution providers and complementary technology vendors.

More information about the conference, including registration forms, presentation tracks, sponsorships and vendor exhibits can be found at www.columbusconsultinginc.com.

About Dale Achabal (Portion of bio from Santa Clara University Web site)

Achabal is the L.J. Skaggs Distinguished Professor and Associate Dean for Research & Development at Santa Clara University. He is also the Director of the Retail Management Institute and the Retail Workbench Research & Education Center, sponsored by a consortium of leading retailers from around the world. Professor Achabal is active in research focusing on the development of decision support and knowledge systems and multi-channel retailing strategies. He has published numerous articles in leading journals including the Journal of Marketing, Journal of Marketing Research, Journal of Retailing, Management Science, Decision Sciences, Geographical Analysis, and Social Science & Medicine. He is also a member of the CIO Council of the National Retail Federation (NRF), the Editorial Board of the Journal of Retailing and a recipient of three national awards for his research.

Professor Achabal received his Ph.D. in Marketing and Regional Economics from The University of Texas at Austin. He has taught in the undergraduate, graduate, and executive development programs at a number of leading universities around the world, including the University of California – Berkeley; University of Florida; ACRS - Monash University, Australia; the Norwegian School of Management; Ohio State University; Oxford University - Templeton College; Sup de Co - Rouen, France; The University of Texas; and Tilburg University - Tias Business School in The Netherlands.

About Columbus Consulting, Inc.

Founded by industry veteran Richard Amari in 2001, Columbus Consulting comprises a team of highly experienced specialists in retail business process and systems. The company works with many of the world's largest and well-known retailers, including American Eagle Outfitters, Ann Taylor, Saks, Big Lots, Guitar Center, CVS Pharmacy, and New York & Company. While Columbus Consulting is called upon to provide a variety of services, their primary focus is in planning & allocation, reporting & analysis, data warehousing and IT strategy/leadership. Projects range in scope from managing short-term, high-impact, executive-level advisory services to overseeing large, multi-disciplinary, multi-million dollar projects, lasting more than a year. For more information on Columbus Consulting, visit www.columbusconsultinginc.com.

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