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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Columbus Consulting Set to Complete Two-Year Project for Big Lots**

*Company helps nation's largest broadline closeout retailer better define merchandising processes and improve planning, inventory productivity and logistics*

**COLUMBUS, Ohio – May 25, 2005** – Following a multi-year engagement, Columbus Consulting, Inc., (CCI) a leading retail merchandise systems consulting firm, is in the final stages of completing several key deliverables and roles critical to the successful implementation of a merchandise planning and allocation solution for Columbus-based Big Lots, Inc., the nation's largest broadline closeout retailer. The projects, which started in May 2003, were CCI's first major efforts in the planning and allocation process space.

During the last two years, CCI has helped Big Lots define its merchandise planning and allocation process and select the appropriate applications to manage the process for the \$4 billion retailer. As a key integration partner, CCI provided implementation assistance and leadership for the planning, allocation, data warehouse, and logistics solutions. The implementation of a *Teradata* data warehouse solution allowed Big Lots to streamline data management and focus on one source of data for its more than 1,500 store, 46-state operations. In addition, CCI helped support logistics operations and system implementation, as well as lead a program management activity over the multiple projects.

“This project was the first major effort for CCI in the planning and allocation process space, and helped catapult CCI into what is now a very healthy consulting practice,” said Rick Amari, president of Columbus Consulting, Inc. “Taking Big Lots from process concepts through selection, and now realizing the completion of the implementations, has demonstrated that we are a full-service provider with strong capabilities from concept through execution. Many retailers have taken note of our success, and as a result, we currently have active projects at 10 different clients addressing some aspect of planning and allocation. We continue to grow because of our understanding of the merchandising process and our ability to execute.”

As a result of the improvements in its planning and allocation process and the centralized data warehouse, Big Lots' executives, managers and merchandisers have better access to information, which allows them to measure business operations across the entire company and react more effectively to market changes and trends. The company can also more effectively plan and make better decisions on deals and inventory investments, as well as improve inventory productivity at the store level. Improvements in the logistics process have resulted in more efficient product movement and visibility with a goal to drive down or effectively manage freight costs.

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“We truly appreciate the efforts of Columbus Consulting in helping implement several key objectives of our supply chain optimization initiatives, including the more extensive involvement in our merchandise planning and allocation process,” added John Zavada, chief information officer for Big Lots. “As a result of a team effort, we are positioned with implemented solutions, which we expect to improve overall inventory management and increase incremental sales, reduce inventory cost, and improve markdown management. We are now able to react better to changing market conditions and manage information and inventory more effectively. The anticipated results will help us to better serve our customers and improve our company’s overall performance.”

**About Big Lots, Inc.**

**Big Lots, Inc.** ([www.biglots.com](http://www.biglots.com)) is the nation's largest broadline closeout retailer with annual revenues exceeding \$4 billion. Headquartered in Columbus, Ohio, Big Lots operates more than 1,500 retail stores serving 46 states. Five regional closeout distribution centers ranging in size from 1 million to 3 million square feet and two furniture distribution centers provide the company’s stores with brand-name products from more than 3,000 manufacturers. Big Lots offers merchandise on average at 20 to 40 percent below most discount retailers and up to 70 percent below conventional retailers. Founded in 1967, the company employs more than 45,000 associates across the U.S. By creating excitement with brand-name closeouts and bargains through a unique shopping experience, Big Lots meets the needs of customers by providing an assortment of merchandise including consumables, seasonal products, furniture and home, housewares, toys, and gifts. Big Lots, a Fortune 500 company, is traded on the New York Stock Exchange under the symbol **BLI**.

**About Columbus Consulting, Inc.**

Founded by industry veteran Richard Amari in 2001, Columbus Consulting, Inc. comprises a team of highly experienced specialists in retail systems and processes. The company works with many of the world’s largest and best-known retailers, including American Eagle Outfitters, Ann Taylor, Big Lots, Saks Fifth Avenue, CVS Pharmacy, and New York & Company. Columbus Consulting is called upon to provide a variety of services. These range from providing short-term, high-impact, executive-level advisory services on matters of system and process strategy, to overseeing large, multi-disciplinary, multi-million dollar projects. The company is based in Columbus, Ohio. For more information on Columbus Consulting, visit [www.columbusconsultinginc.com](http://www.columbusconsultinginc.com).

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