

# Battle of the Brands

## Generic Versus Store Brand Versus Name Brand

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Generic brands first appeared in the late 1970's with no fancy name or picture on the package—only contents, a UPC code, ingredients and any other required information (white or yellow label with black print = “no frills”). They may often forego the convenience of a pop-top and require use of a can opener, thus saving money. These products became popular when inflation prompted consumers to make price their top priority. Many who shopped in the 70's remember buying many of these items to save money. Back then, there were more issues with quality (more liquid, broken pieces, pits, etc.) From generics to store brands, they have come a long way.

There are also “copycat” and “knock-off” brands that try to mimic name-brand products and capitalize on their marketing/name recognition to sway loyal customers with a similar products at reduced costs. (Names of these new products may sound similar and products will look and smell similar.)

Store brands (also called “private label”) are products that are sold under a retailer's private label (e.g. Publix, Winn Dixie, Kash 'n' Karry/Sweetbay, etc.) The label may bare the same name as the retail grocery store or may have a name owned exclusively by that chain (e.g. Wal-Mart has Great Value). They may even have several formulations and target different audiences (value versus premium lines). National companies may also produce store brands in other categories but do not usually want to compete with themselves. These store brands do compete with name brands in quality, packaging, and the wide variety of products offered in almost every food product category. (In 2003, 57% of sugar sales were derived from store brand products.) Today, on the average, one in five products sold in the grocery store carry the chain's name.

Name brands (e.g. Kellogg, Kraft, Frito-Lay, General Mills, and Nabisco) tend to be the leaders in product technology. These manufacturers and their products have major national recognition due to advertising efforts through various media such as television, magazines, and newspapers. They further market their product by packaging and tend to have higher quality standards. They also pay slotting fees to obtain better placement on store shelves; all this adds to the final cost of the product.

Over the past 30 years, consumers' feelings about buying store brands seem to have varied with the current shape of the economy. During tough times they are more likely to save

money by buying store-brand staples to stock their pantries (especially canned fruits/vegetables, flour, sugar, pasta, etc.).

Now that the price of gas and other products are up, consumers, who are not already doing so, may want to check out these products. They carry little risk, and many offer a money-back refund if you are disappointed with the product. It is estimated that you can save an average of 15-20% across all product lines at supermarkets (even more on generic drugs and store-brand merchandise). At times, you may save as much as 50% on a certain store-brand item. You also may find that you will prefer some store brands over the name brands. When your name-brand favorites have a “buy-one-get-one-free” sale, this is the time to stock up on these items—they may even be cheaper than store brands, especially if you have a coupon to go with that offer!

### Examples of what to look for in some of the most commonly purchased store-brand products:

Canned fruits/vegetables – First, check flavor. Look for amount of liquid versus solid. There may be more broken/smaller pieces. You may find an occasional cherry or peach pit or an end left on a green bean but that is more uncommon these days, unless the brand is really low-cost/lower grade. Of course, “fresh is best” but nutritionally, there is no difference in canned products, and they are a convenient way to help get your adequate amounts of fruits and vegetables (serving recommendations just increased from “Five-A-Day” to 9 or 10 servings a day, which equals to 4 1/2 to 5 cups). Look for reduced sodium in vegetables and fruits packed in juice, not syrup.

Dairy products (milk and yogurt) – With prices increasing in this area recently due to the demand of corn for alternative fuel, it is all the more reason to try store brands. Most of you will not be disappointed in the flavor of store-brand milk products and may even prefer them over the name brands. When purchasing yogurt, look on the label for active cultures but watch for added gums and sweeteners. More importantly, check the expiration dates and keep these products refrigerated!

French fries – Check for taste and crispiness preferences. Remember to reduce calories by baking instead of frying, and the fewer cuts absorb the least fat (choose steak fries over waffle-cut).

Paper products – Generally the issues in this area are strength, softness and absorption.

- Facial tissues – (strength/softness). If you have a bad cold and your nose is sore, you may want to pay more for a certain brand with added softness or even lotion.
- Paper towels/napkins – (strength/absorption). Some companies may actually make a couple of different versions (high-end/low-end) to reach different audiences. Buying recycled is usually cheaper, but it is not always noted on the label, since there is still a misbelief that recycled is not clean.
- Toilet tissue – (strength/softness). Some products can be rough, and others may fall apart while using/before disposal.

Plastic bags – The main concern is strength and type of closure. If it is something like a zipper-top bag, the question is, “Do you need this type of bag just for a sandwich?” The zip-strips with color are easier for someone with impaired vision to detect closure, and the slide closures would be useful for someone with arthritis, but all these features cost more; and the fact is, a reusable container is best for the environment!

Sugar – It seems to be the consensus of most consumers that there is not a difference in quality between store brands and name brands. Sugar takes the largest share of the store-brand label market!

### **Bottom Line:**

A lot depends on your personal preferences, but you will find that many store brands are at least as good as the name brands and in some cases even better!

You might be surprised to find out that some of your favorite big-name companies may be making many of these products “behind-the-scenes”!

Best of all...switching from a name brand to a store brand can save you as much as 50% on a product; this can really add up over the year to hundreds of dollars—maybe even thousands—

depending on the size of your family and number of meals prepared and eaten at home!

### **A Dozen Other Shopping Tips to Help You Save Money:**

1. Make a food budget and be dedicated to follow it.
2. Plan your meals for at least a week that include healthy snacks.
3. Make a shopping list and stick to it to avoid impulse buying.
4. Create your shopping list with the store layout in mind (saves time and money).
5. Be sure to pick up refrigerated and frozen foods last (food safety).
6. Limit high-calorie, low-nutrient extras (convenience foods, sodas, chips, etc.)
7. Check food ads. Take advantage of seasonal produce (flavor quality improves while prices go down), store brands and special offers.
8. Double your savings by clipping coupons and taking advantage of store specials (“two for one”) to stock up on things you normally buy.
9. Know the regular prices of items you buy often, so you can compare and tell a bargain when you see it.
10. Buy in bulk and store for later use, but make sure that you will be able to use it all before it spoils.
11. Grow some of your own fruits and vegetables in your own garden or in containers on a patio/balcony. Container gardening works especially well for those with limited space.
12. Don't go shopping when you are hungry!

Note: The use of trade names in this publication is solely for the purpose of specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the products and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.