

P&G to stop e-coupons for Kroger loyalty cards

December 17 2009, By DAN SEWELL , AP Business Writer

(AP) -- Procter & Gamble Co. is getting a digital divorce from Kroger Co., severing the online coupon program the two Cincinnati-based companies began two years ago.

P&G e-mailed customers this week to say they won't be able to download "eSaver" paperless coupons for Pampers diapers, Tide detergent and other products to their Kroger loyalty cards after Dec. 31. The company also said the coupons should be redeemed by Dec. 31.

P&G and Kroger first tried out digital coupons two years ago. Kroger also has teamed with AOL's Shortcuts, Cellfire and P&G rival Unilever on digital coupons and said it's talking with other potential partners.

"As a leader in making it easy for customers to use online coupons, we continue to expand our offers on kroger.com," Kroger spokeswoman Meghan Glynn said Wednesday. "While we regret P&G's decision, kroger.com will continue to have great coupon offers from a variety of partners for our customers."

P&G spokeswoman Judi Kletz said the company wouldn't discuss reasons for the cancellation and termed the Kroger team-up "a market test."

"We continue to be excited about the eSaver program," she said. She didn't identify potential retail partners for the digital coupons.

Shoppers can still use traditional paper coupons for P&G products at Kroger's 2,470 stores in 31 states.

The decision comes as the nation's largest traditional grocery chain is changing its online coupon site and planned to stop redirecting visitors to a P&G site that also offers samples and other P&G promotions.

P&G, the world's largest consumer products company, declined to say Wednesday whether that was the reason for its decision, but said it plans to keep offering eSaver coupons.

Kroger said P&G's decision is regrettable, but that it will continue to add online partners.

Coupons have made a comeback during the recession, with a wide range of electronic promotions growing fastest. Their use more than doubled in the first half of 2009 compared with the same period a year earlier, coupon-processing company Inmar Inc. has reported.

Shoppers load the discounts onto their store loyalty cards and receive credit at checkout. Other grocers that let customers virtually attach digital coupons to their cards include Pleasanton, Calif.-based Safeway Inc. and Pittsburgh-based Giant Eagle.

Grocers see electronic coupons as a way to build customer loyalty and draw consumers who are spending more time online. P&G and Kroger also have said they help bring in rich consumer data.

P&G said in a statement Wednesday that it still has "a strong partnership with Kroger" and, "We will continue to explore ways to make our product offers available to our consumers online as well as in traditional channels."

Word was spreading among the many bloggers who trade coupon information and savings tips online. One, called ClipperGirl, posted a picture of a frowning baby under the heading: "It's a sad day for Kroger shoppers."

<http://www.kroger.com>

<http://www.pgeverydaysolutions.com>

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