

# Who Is the High-Frequency C-store Shopper?

Our exclusive consumer research sheds light on those who shop daily and weekly **BY ANGELA HANSON**



**F**or some retailers, one sale is as good as another, and every dollar is worth the same amount. This is objectively true, but industry insiders and savvy convenience store retailers have long known that regular customers hold more value than the contents of their wallet. Strategies that prioritize increasing the basket size of existing customers are

more lucrative than those that try to attract new customers, and regular shoppers are more profitable than the occasional visitors.

This year, *Convenience Store News*' exclusive Realities of the Aisle annual consumer study highlights the differences between frequent c-store shoppers — those who shop at a convenience store on a daily or weekly basis — and shoppers who visit c-stores less than once a week.

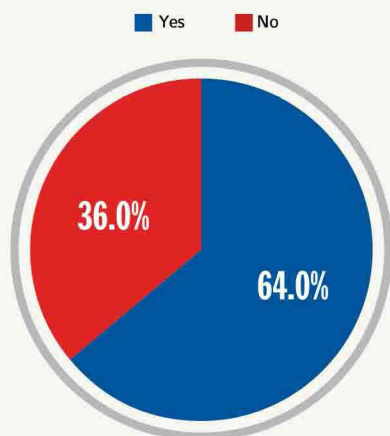
Of the 1,505 consumers surveyed for the eighth-annual *CSNews* Realities of the Aisle study, 64.4 percent qualified for the “frequent shopper” label, shopping at a c-store on a daily or weekly basis. Men are more likely to fall into this group at 67.8 percent, vs. 59.6 percent of women.

Men are also more likely to be daily c-store shoppers. A total of 14.6 percent of men are daily shoppers, again more than the 11 percent of females who shop at c-stores at this pace. It also follows, then, that women are more likely to be infrequent shoppers. In fact, 40.4 percent of females shop at c-stores at a rate of once a month, compared to 32.2 percent of men.

Looking at other characteristics, frequent c-store shoppers are most often found in the 45- to 54-year-old age range (68 percent); the \$75,000-\$99,999 and \$35,000-or-less income ranges (66 percent and 65.9 percent, respectively); and in the Northeast (68.8 percent).

Among shoppers with children, 66 percent are in

## Do you typically shop at the same convenience store each time?



Base: 969 frequent c-store shoppers  
Source: *Convenience Store News* Market Research, 2017

a c-store daily or weekly, compared to 63.2 percent of those without kids. On a daily basis, the difference between these two groups becomes more significant: 15.7 percent among those with kids, vs. 11.2 percent for those without.

Along with making c-store visits part of their regular routine, frequent shoppers are more loyal to particular c-stores. Sixty-four percent of daily/weekly shoppers typically visit the same c-store each time, compared to 61 percent of monthly shoppers. Daily shoppers are the most loyal segment, as seven in 10 say they typically return to the same store every time.

Regular shopping trips seem to be standard for frequent shoppers even outside the convenience channel. When asked how often they visit other types of stores, 83.1 percent of frequent c-store shoppers said they visit grocery stores on a daily or weekly basis, and 71.6 percent visit supercenters (such as Walmart or Target) on a daily or weekly basis. Only 12.6 percent of frequent c-store shoppers visit grocery stores once a month, and 25.5 percent visit supercenters once a month.

#### THE WHAT & WHEN

Purchasing beverages (packaged or dispensed) and purchasing gasoline are the most common reasons to shop at a c-store. The vast majority of all consumers CSNews surveyed — and 100 percent of daily c-store shoppers — listed these as top reasons.

Interestingly, both frequent and infrequent c-store shoppers said they typically visit to buy gasoline at comparable levels (81.2 percent vs. 78.5 percent, respectively). Frequent c-store shoppers, though, stand out when it comes to the purchase of food and drinks.

Of the most commonly listed reasons to shop at a c-store, frequent shoppers listed snacks more often than infrequent shoppers did, at 70.1 percent compared to 58.4 percent. This pattern was also seen with bottled/canned soda (56.2 percent vs. 44.4 percent); fountain/frozen beverages (50.5 percent vs. 36.9 percent); hot beverages (48.9 percent vs. 36.2 percent); candy/gum (45.1 percent vs. 34 percent); and prepared food/fast food for immediate consumption (43.7 percent vs. 23.7 percent).

Regardless of what they buy, frequent c-store shoppers are likely to combine the shopping trip with another reason for being out and about. Daily shoppers are most likely to visit a c-store while traveling to or from work or school (80.7 percent), making these trips part of their regular routine, as well as while running other errands (73.6 percent). Weekly c-store shop-

## For what reason(s) do you typically shop at a convenience store?

	TOTAL	FREQUENT	INFREQUENT
(Base)	(1,505)	(969)	(536)
To buy beverages (net)	98.3%	99.1%	97.0%
To buy gasoline	80.3%	81.2%	78.5%
To buy snacks	65.9%	70.1%	58.4%
To buy packaged beverages	52.0%	56.2%	44.4%
To buy fountain/frozen beverages	45.6%	50.5%	36.9%
To buy hot beverages	44.4%	48.9%	36.2%
To buy candy/gum	41.1%	45.1%	34.0%
To buy prepared food/fast food for immediate consumption	36.5%	43.7%	23.7%
To buy lottery tickets	38.8%	42.8%	31.5%
To use the restroom	32.3%	33.5%	30.0%
To buy food for consumption later or at home	21.7%	26.4%	13.1%
To buy cigarettes	18.7%	23.2%	10.6%
To buy a newspaper/magazine	17.7%	20.3%	12.9%
To use the ATM	17.1%	20.1%	11.6%
To look around/browse	11.6%	12.8%	9.3%
To buy other tobacco products (smokeless, cigars, etc.)	8.3%	10.9%	3.5%
To buy fill-in grocery items	6.4%	7.4%	4.7%
To buy health and beauty care products	3.3%	4.1%	1.9%
Other	0.8%	0.6%	1.1%

Base: Respondents who shopped at a c-store in the past month  
Multiple responses accepted  
Source: Convenience Store News Market Research, 2017

For now or later, frequent shoppers are about twice as likely to shop for food as infrequent shoppers.

## At what time(s) of day do you typically shop at convenience stores?

	TOTAL	FREQUENT	INFREQUENT
(Base)	(1,505)	(969)	(536)
6 a.m. - 8:59 a.m.	41.5%	46.6%	32.3%
9 a.m. - 10:59 a.m.	27.0%	28.0%	25.4%
11 a.m. - 1:59 p.m.	34.9%	37.6%	30.0%
2 p.m. - 3:59 p.m.	35.7%	36.7%	34.0%
4 p.m. - 6:59 p.m.	57.7%	61.1%	51.7%
7 p.m. - 10 p.m.	37.7%	42.0%	30.0%
Later than 10 p.m.	12.4%	15.6%	6.5%
Don't know	1.9%	1.0%	3.5%

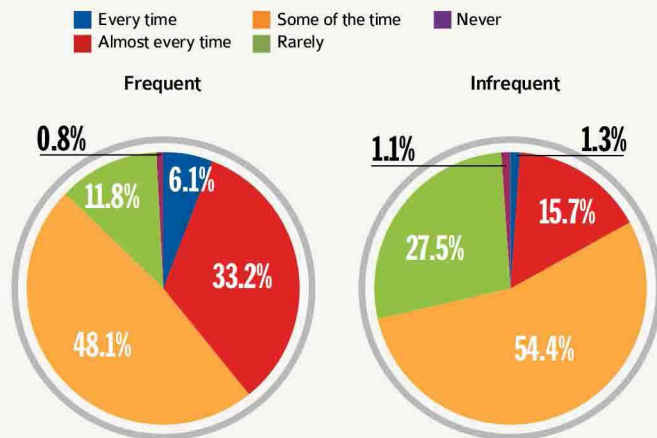
Base: Respondents who shopped at a c-store in the past month  
Multiple responses accepted  
Source: Convenience Store News Market Research, 2017

pers are most likely to plan their trips and combine them with running other errands (73.8 percent).

Making a special trip to the c-store from home is not out of the question, however: 57.9 percent of daily shoppers and 42 percent of weekly shoppers report that they typically do so, compared to only



## How often do you buy in-store merchandise when you stop for gas at a convenience store?



Base: 841 frequent and 458 infrequent shoppers who purchased gasoline/motor fuels at a c-store in the past month  
Source: Convenience Store News Market Research, 2017

24.4 percent of infrequent shoppers. Frequent c-store shoppers as a group are less likely to visit a c-store while traveling for business (25.7 percent).

The routine nature of frequent shoppers' visits to c-stores is also evident in the most common times of day when they make their trips. The most common time period is 4 p.m. to 6:59 p.m., when 61.1 percent of frequent shoppers typically visit a c-store, indicating they are probably buying food or drink for their evening meal. The next most popular timeframes for this group are between 6 a.m. and 8:59 a.m. (46.6 percent) and 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. (42 percent). For infrequent shoppers, 4 p.m. to 6:59 p.m. is also the favored time period, cited by 51.7 percent of these shoppers, but still less so than among frequent shoppers.

During c-store shopping trips that involve stopping to buy gas, infrequent shoppers are more likely to say they also purchase in-store merchandise "some of the time" at 54.4 percent, compared to 48.1 percent of frequent shoppers. Meanwhile, more than twice as many frequent shoppers say they buy in-store merchandise "almost every time" at 33.2 percent, compared to 15.7 percent of infrequent shoppers.

## How often do you shop at each of the following types of stores?

	DAILY/WEEKLY	ONCE A MONTH	ONCE EVERY SIX MONTHS	RARELY/NEVER
Grocery stores	82.5%	13.2%	2.5%	1.8%
Supercenters (Walmart, Target, etc.)	68.5%	27.0%	3.3%	1.2%
Online (Amazon, Peapod, etc.)	42.7%	36.1%	11.2%	10.0%
Drugstores	39.9%	45.1%	11.3%	3.7%
Dollar stores	36.7%	39.5%	15.0%	8.8%

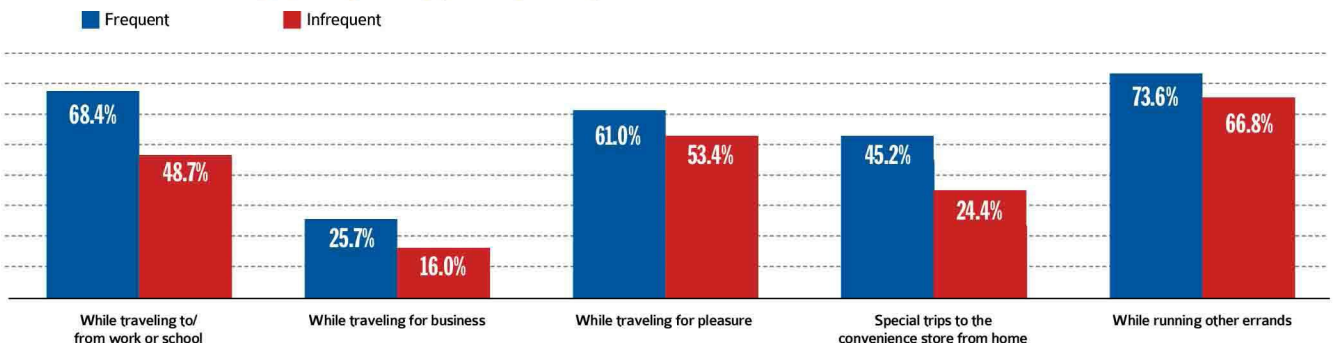
Base: 969 frequent c-store shoppers  
Source: Convenience Store News Market Research, 2017

### MAKING A HABIT

Perhaps because of their increased willingness to shop at c-stores regularly, more than half of frequent c-store shoppers also report that some outside element influences their decision to visit a c-store. Frequent c-store shoppers as a group are more likely than infrequent shoppers to list any individual element as an influencer.

They are most likely to cite a loyalty

## On what occasion(s) do you typically shop at a convenience store?



Base: 969 frequent c-store shoppers; 536 infrequent c-store shoppers  
Multiple responses accepted  
Source: Convenience Store News Market Research, 2017

program, at 23.3 percent compared to 17 percent of infrequent shoppers. Daily shoppers in particular are likely to cite a loyalty program, as 62.9 percent did so compared to 49.9 percent of weekly shoppers. Frequent c-store shoppers are also more likely to say they are enrolled in their favorite c-store's loyalty program (39.5 percent) than infrequent shoppers (31.2 percent).

Retailers that want to increase their number of familiar faces should consider adding a loyalty program, as 35.4 percent of frequent shoppers say they would enroll if one existed at their favorite store. And adding a loyalty program can be an all-around win, as infrequent shoppers are likely to join as well: 31.2 percent say their usual c-store offers a loyalty program and they are enrolled, while 37.3 percent say their store does not have one, but they'd enroll if it did.

Another (not surprising) reason for c-store operators to court their highest frequency shoppers is that this group spends more money at their stores per visit. When asked how much they spent during their last in-store visit to a c-store (excluding fuel purchases), frequent shoppers averaged \$16.22, compared to \$14.12 for infrequent shoppers. This figure for daily shoppers was even higher, averaging \$19.45 on their last visit.

Both frequent and infrequent shoppers are most likely to have paid for their last in-store purchase with cash (40.3 percent and 39.8 percent, respectively), followed by debit cards and credit cards. Frequent shoppers were slightly more likely to have used a debit card, while infrequent shoppers were slightly more likely to have used a credit card.

### Did any promotional elements influence your decision to buy in-store products on a recent c-store trip to purchase gasoline?

	TOTAL	FREQUENT	INFREQUENT
(Base)	(1,299)	(841)	(458)
Frequent buyer/loyalty programs	17.0%	19.0%	13.3%
Banners/window signs	12.5%	13.7%	10.5%
Promotional signage	11.9%	13.6%	8.7%
Gasoline nozzle display ads	7.5%	8.7%	5.2%
Coupons dispensed from pump	6.6%	8.0%	4.1%
Pumptopper ads	5.8%	6.8%	3.9%
Car wash promotions	5.7%	5.9%	5.2%
Mobile app promotions/deals	5.5%	6.1%	4.6%
Video displays on pump	4.3%	4.8%	3.5%
Audio music feed with messages	2.3%	3.0%	1.1%

Base: Purchased gasoline/motor fuels at a c-store in the past month  
Source: Convenience Store News Market Research, 2017

This figure jumps to 20% among daily c-store shoppers.

### How much did you spend on your last in-store visit to a convenience store?\*

Total \$15.59



\*Not including gasoline/motor fuel  
Source: Convenience Store News Market Research, 2017

### Have any of the following elements influenced your decision to visit a convenience store?

	TOTAL	FREQUENT	INFREQUENT
(Base)	(1,505)	(969)	(536)
Influenced (net)	50.2%	52.5%	46.1%
Loyalty program	21.1%	23.3%	17.0%
Word of mouth	12.2%	13.3%	10.3%
Coupon	12.1%	13.2%	10.1%
Gas price app	12.0%	11.9%	12.1%
Mobile app offer from convenience store	5.3%	6.1%	3.9%
Billboard	5.7%	5.8%	5.6%
Radio or TV advertisement	4.1%	4.3%	3.5%
Email	4.0%	4.3%	3.4%
Print circular	3.3%	3.6%	2.8%
Promotion or message on social media	2.9%	3.4%	1.9%
Text message	3.1%	3.0%	3.2%
Not influenced	49.8%	47.5%	53.9%

Base: Respondents who shopped at a c-store in the past month  
Source: Convenience Store News Market Research, 2017

This figure jumps to 62.9% among daily c-store shoppers.