

Industry's Pump-to-Store Conversion Rate Plateaus

CSNews research shows frequent shoppers key to improvement.

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NATIONAL REPORT — Since 2011, convenience stores have greatly improved their ability to lure consumers from the fuel dispensers at the forecourt into the store to buy food, drinks and other merchandise.

This year, nearly a third of consumers who purchased gas at a convenience store said they go inside the store to make additional purchases. That's more than twice the rate of only six years ago, when just 15 percent of shoppers said they go from the tanks to the store, according to the annual *Convenience Store News Realities of the Aisle Consumer Study*.

Since 2011, that conversion rate improved steadily until plateauing at 33.1 percent in 2015. Last year, the rate of converting fuel consumers to in-store shoppers was 33 percent. In this year's *Realities of the Aisle* study, the conversion rate dipped slightly to 31.4 percent.

Similarly, the percentage of consumers who buy gas but rarely or never go inside the store fell from 47.6 percent in 2011 to 15.6 percent in 2015, before inching up again to 18.2 percent in 2017.

This year's research findings suggest that c-store retailers can get past this 31- to 33-percent conversion plateau by focusing on increasing their number of frequent or heavy shoppers. More than half of consumers who stopped at a c-store on a daily basis (55.1 percent) this year went inside the store to make a purchase every, or almost every, time they stopped for gas. Even weekly shoppers went into the store more often than average (35.1 percent).

About 40 percent of gas shoppers who did go in the store said they did so due to some kind of promotional element that drew them inside. The largest percentage (17 percent) were drawn in by a frequent buyer or loyalty program.

Look in the August issue of *Convenience Store News* for more on this research.



By Don Longo, Convenience Store News *About Don Longo* Don Longo is editorial director of EnsembleIQ's Convenience Store News. He has covered retailing for more than 30 years as a reporter, editor and publisher. Previously, he spearheaded the editorial efforts at a variety of business publications focused on mass, drug, grocery and specialty store retailing.

Convenience Store News won American Business Media's Jesse H. Neal Award for Best Issue of the Year in 2008 and 2012. Longo has won numerous other editorial awards over his career and is frequently quoted in the national and local news media on the subjects of retailing and consumer trends.