



How Independent Retailers Can Stand Out and Boost Customer Loyalty

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After the pandemic forced consumers to change their daily lifestyles,

many are now resuming their commutes, recalibrating their schedules and solidifying the minutiae of their daily routines—from where they fuel up their cars to where they stop for coffee and a breakfast sandwich on a work morning.

This marks a crucial point for convenience stores: Retailers need to retain the customers who began doing more of their shopping at the c-store during the pandemic, and they need to convert those who may have been shopping inside the store less frequently in recent years.

Especially at a time when consumers may be more amenable to trying something new, c-stores have the opportunity to expand and sustain a loyal customer base—and that means making sure each shopper's experience is a great one. Here are some ways retailers can do just that.

Leverage best-selling brands to encourage retention

Among customers who began shopping for household staples at the c-store during the last couple of years, many also began purchasing c-store foodservice and browsing other products more than before. As market conditions continue to change, developing customer retention strategies is crucial. Establishing themselves as customers' go-to retailer for their favorite brands and products, for example, gives c-stores a way to differentiate themselves from the competition.

CSP's 2022 [Convenience Retailing University](#) conference highlighted best practices for leveraging customers' favorite products to improve retention: Try placing the most in-demand products in well-trafficked areas and use shippers to draw the attention of brand-loyal shoppers, for example. Incorporating popular products into discounts can also help expand patronage across the store and on the forecourt; tying



a product to a fuel discount can encourage shoppers to stay loyal to a specific store for their gasoline.

Address labor challenges, improve customer service

In addition to building a roster of best-selling merchandise, prioritizing customer service while optimizing labor is crucial to boosting loyalty. Current labor challenges can be an obstacle to creating great customer experiences; according to Technomic's 2022: *The Year of the Climb* webinar, most c-store employees say they've noticed that shoppers are annoyed by slow or poor service in the store. Inversely, customer satisfaction sees a boost from efficient, friendly service—creating another positive point of differentiation for a retailer's brand.

At a time when many c-stores are struggling to fully staff their stores, however, improving customer service may seem more easily said than done. To focus labor toward customer-facing services, retailers can start by identifying employees' most time-consuming and difficult tasks and by seeking

affordable ways to outsource them. And for many c-stores, finding solutions to address current supply-chain challenges is of particular importance.

Navigate supply-chain disruptions to boost loyalty

A dependable supply of in-demand items is especially important to developing loyalty during rush hours when shoppers are short on time—and when recruiting a base of regular customers is especially profitable. According to a consumer poll from Retail Insight, 71% of consumers say current in-store out-of-stocks are even worse than they were amid panic-buying at the start of the pandemic, and out-of-stocks can pose a significant threat to customer retention.

According to [IRI](#), most grocery shoppers will take their money elsewhere if their desired product is out of stock, and this is likely the case for c-store customers as well; 29% of shoppers said they skipped the purchase when their desired product or brand was out of stock, and 39% said they bought what they wanted at a competing store instead.



Especially for independent retailers, it's crucial to establish an efficient, dependable system for ordering product and for finding alternative items to meet customers' needs when certain brands and varieties are out of stock or delayed. While some independents may try purchasing products from a local wholesaler, this can be time-consuming and costly—ultimately undermining labor efficiency and reducing profits overall.

Solutions for current obstacles and enduring success

For these reasons, among others, leaning on the expertise of a distribution partner can help independent c-stores optimize their product selection—and find alternatives amid disruptions in supply—without inflating operating costs or drawing employees away from customer-facing responsibilities.

Services and technologies from McLane, one of the largest supply chain services leaders in the United States, are tailored to meet the specialized needs of the industries they serve. McLane offers c-stores end-to-end solutions that can optimize product assortment to maximize sales; decrease labor and operating costs; and allow retailers and their employees to focus on other key areas of the business.

Because independent c-stores encounter challenges distinct from those faced by larger chains, McLane provides independent retailers a dedicated sales representative that is with them every step of the way to help them strategize and save.



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