

DRIVING CONSUMERS BEYOND THE PUMP

SIX TRENDS TO FULLY ENGAGE
THE C-STORE CONSUMER



EVOLVING INTO THE C-STORE OF THE FUTURE

Expansion in the c-store industry continues to surge – with products and services that appeal to the on-the-go-consumer serving as the driving force behind the growth. C-stores are continuously challenged to maintain their value proposition despite evolving consumer expectations and

technological advances that force them to keep up with formidable new competitors. Even the most established c-store powerhouses are challenged to find new ways to evolve their consumer experience in order to remain top of mind.

Although the way that consumers view convenience is shifting, these up-and-coming trends will not reshape the industry overnight and the c-store still has time to evolve into a retail destination. Is your brand ready to meet the challenge of keeping up with the progressive needs and expectations of your consumers?



01 FILTERING OUT THE COMPETITION

With seasonal flavors and Instagram-worthy photo opportunities, coffee shops seemingly have a leg-up on c-stores when it comes to craveable concoctions. However, competing with local cafes, or even coffee shop giants, does not need to be difficult or expensive. All it takes to rethink the coffee bar is a little creativity and dedication to the details.

Through the well-executed design of an inviting and relaxed space, you're creating an environment that is a destination for customization. This can be achieved through distinctive elements within a communal area that contains contemporary décor, comfortable furnishings, and more artisanal bean-to-cup coffee options that achieve the same great taste as the competition but at a more affordable price point.



02 FORWARD-THINKING FOOD SERVICE

With the continual rise of electric vehicles, we are seeing an increasing number of convenience stores evolving into a fuel-less environment. This trend is requiring a number of c-stores to morph into something new – a dining destination. Anyone can add a few tables and chairs next to their grab-and-go kiosks and call it a day; but when it comes to food offerings and the dining experience, convenience stores can no longer afford to stick to the basics.

Your competitors are thinking food-forward and forcing consumers to view them as a dining option by embracing more compelling offerings that mirror that of a traditional QSR. Nobody can truly enjoy artisanal menu options from their cars, so an innovative menu must also be supported by a space that allows for optimal enjoyment. This can be achieved through welcoming fixtures as well as elemental brick, wood, or stone textures that are complemented by eye-catching graphics which serve to enhance your brand as well as the inviting experience that you are aiming to create.



03 A SOCIALLY OPTIMIZED SPACE

We are living in an “experience-is-everything” culture and for younger generations this means that the ability to share their experience on social media is more important than the products you sell. You can curate a more photo worthy environment through the incorporation of details that differentiate your brand from others. Wall murals, patterned flooring, and vibrant interiors all create a built-in-backdrop for the perfect photo op. Visually aesthetic packaging and brand touchpoints can serve to create recognizable moments of engagement that are sure to show up in selfies.

You also can't forget to incorporate the factors that are essential to helping your consumers take a quality photo. Lighting in your space should be at a naturalistic level to create images that do not require a filter. You might also consider “lounge” areas where consumers can charge their devices and spend time enjoying your products as they craft the perfect caption for their social feeds.



04 WHAT'S ON TAP?

Alcohol sales are climbing at a record pace and c-stores are experiencing more growth than any other channel. While craft beer has momentum, challenges remain as convenience stores are the most constrained for space among retail venues. Beer caves and wine cellars are an important consideration for many c-stores, as more room to stock results in a greater product assortment.

Making the alcohol segment of your space memorable can be a great traffic driver. A well-designed beer cave, wine cellar, or growler station can be as simple as adding a unique graphic or finish to the wall or tap line-up. More elaborate solutions have included themed experiences and educational graphics that help guests navigate the complexity of this ever-growing alcohol-connoisseur landscape.



05 FINDING NATURAL SUCCESS

What began in the industry as a few bananas by the cash register is now a full-blown movement aimed at offering healthier quick-bite options to consumers. With organic and sustainable foods going mainstream, many convenience stores are noticing a growing need to integrate more natural items into their grab-and-go offerings.

Some convenience stores are even taking it a step further by undergoing cosmetic updates to meet the demands of their health-conscious consumers through a sectioned floor plan. With minimalist details and user-friendly merchandising, you can create a mini store-within-a-store environment that demonstrates your brand's compassion through details that cater to the consumer's health-conscious needs. Organic materials can give your space an elemental tone, while digital displays can vibrantly showcase the refreshing alternatives that are more alluring to a nutrient-focused consumer base.



06 CUSTOMIZED CONVENIENCE

We've gone over how to transform portions of your space into a craveable coffee bar, top of mind dining destination, and the go-to for drinks after work, but how do you maximize the other 75% of your store? We're glad you asked because if the layout of your space is unorganized and unappealing, it won't matter if you have the best nitro brewed coffee or street tacos in town.

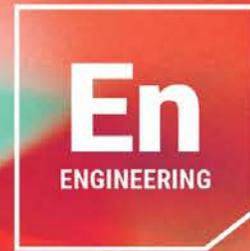
When designing your layout, it's important to consider that consumers are demanding more efficient shopping experiences. If they can fuel their car, purchase a few groceries, and pick up dinner all in one stop, they will. However, the challenge that many c-stores face with this concept is meeting such a diverse group of needs while maintaining an organized and inviting environment.

Your c-store does not need to offer every product or service under the sun to cater to a consumer's needs. Appropriately spaced aisles and a well organized product segmentation go a long way in creating an inviting and efficient shopping experience. Incorporating clean color palettes and interior graphics serve to reinforce your brand message. In the end, positive experiences, when implemented well, feed traffic growth and foster loyalty.



A BIT ABOUT CESO

For more than 30 years, CESO has designed, engineered, and built consumer experiences for some of the world's best companies. Our team has deep expertise in the convenience store category, having worked for some of the most successful c-store brands. We hope you find this report inspiring and helpful. #TeamCESO



THANKS!

If you would like to learn more about how the design team at CESO can help make your brand experience more memorable and relevant to the ever-evolving needs of your consumers, drop us a note!

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