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Lasting Loyalty: A Guide to C-Store Success

Best practices, insights, and guidance for fuel and convenience retailers from PDI Technologies

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Ready to Transform Your Loyalty Game?

Customer loyalty has become one of the greatest competitive differentiators in the fuel and convenience retail market. If you can continually attract new shoppers and turn them into loyal customers, you have the foundation for long-lasting business success.

But loyalty is a two-way street. As loyalty programs evolve from mass communications to tightly defined customer segmentation, how do you engage with consumers on their terms?

The answer? Smart loyalty strategies that work for both you and potential customers. This guide reveals how to create increasingly personalized 1:1 experiences that turn casual shoppers into devoted fans—without losing your unique "convenience" advantage.

About This Guide

This guide highlights key trends, best practices, and actionable steps to enhance loyalty program performance. Discover new ways to improve the impact, scope, and scale of your loyalty programs so you can deliver the elevated experiences your customers demand.

6 Questions to Ask about Your Loyalty Strategy

How do you...

1 Source, organize, and leverage customer data?

2 Use that data to validate what your customers actually value?

3 Develop and deliver impactful offers faster?

4 Orchestrate more effectively across the right channels?

5 Track, measure, and report your KPIs and other results?

6 Keep evolving to create more meaningful loyalty experiences?

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How Do You Make Loyalty More Profitable?

C-store shoppers regularly cite loyalty programs as the primary reason for visiting a specific store. Managed correctly, your loyalty program can quickly go from a cost center to a profit-maker. The true value of loyalty lies in the bottom-line results.

It **costs 5x more** to acquire a new customer than it does to keep an existing one

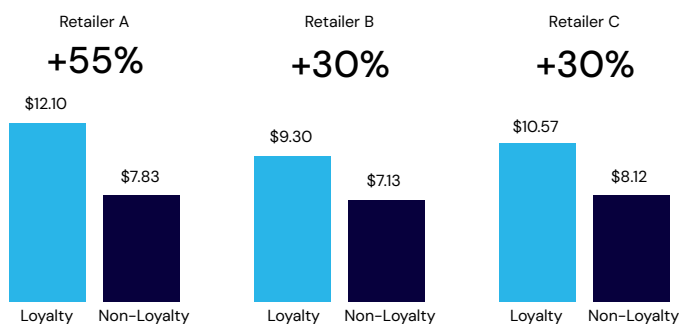On average, 15% of a business' most loyal customers account for **55 to 70% of sales**

Returning customers spend on average **67% more** than first-time customers

On average, loyalty members spend **30% more** than non-loyalty members

Loyalty vs Non-Loyalty Spend per Inside Trip

Retailer A
+55%

$12.10 — Loyalty
$7.83 — Non-Loyalty

Retailer B
+30%

$9.30 — Loyalty
$7.13 — Non-Loyalty

Retailer C
+30%

$10.57 — Loyalty
$8.12 — Non-Loyalty

Source: PDI Technologies

33%

of customers leave brands after just one bad experience.

5 reasons why c-store loyalty programs underperform:

1. Lack of employee-customer engagement
2. Perception that rewards require too many purchases
3. Difficulty understanding program value
4. Concerns about data usage and privacy
5. General disinterest and app fatigue

Do You Have a Mystery Shopper Program?

Be sure to incorporate loyalty program scoring as you evaluate employee knowledge and performance to assess loyalty customer engagement.

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3 Trends that Lead to Customers Loving Your Brand

Go beyond transactional loyalty—which is simply a behavior—and start building an emotional connection with your customers. Emphasize what makes your brand unique and integrate your values into your loyalty program to foster a more meaningful brand/consumer connection.

1. Get hyper-personal

› Leverage data to go beyond standard customer segmentation to offer tailored recommendations and rewards that make them feel truly appreciated.

› Target customers based on their unique preferences, such as receiving offers through SMS, email, push notification, in-app messaging, or social media.

› Introduce exclusive or premium options to differentiate experiences that lead to even stronger bonds with your customers.

2. Prioritize an omnichannel experience

› Make sure your loyalty programs integrate across online, mobile app, and physical in-store platforms to deliver a consistent, seamless experience.

› Go where your customers are, using real-time data to meet them in the moment for personalized offers, simplified rewards, and flexible payment options.

› Protect your business and your customers' data with robust security and data privacy practices across all channels and platforms.

3. Deliver actual convenience and value

› Move past transactional rewards to deliver VIP treatment, exclusive offers, and early access that creates a more memorable experience.

› Double down on instant gratification with more immediate offers and real-time incentives, such as instant reward sign-up bonuses.

› Introduce tiered benefits or subscription models that feature ongoing progression and achievement levels tied to additional benefits and value.

Hot Trend: Subscriptions

Leading-edge loyalty programs transcend traditional experiences with subscription services that drive repeat visits and recurring revenue. A mobile-based subscription program can be a compelling way to boost engagement.

The Key to Success? Training and Store Execution.

Loyalty is more than just a program. It's a culture that starts at the top of your company, but its success depends on your front-line staff.

Today's consumers are craving more meaningful connection than ever, even digital-savvy generations like Gen Z. That's why your team must be able to personalize customer service while showcasing the value of your loyalty program within your overall brand experience.

You can prepare your team by training them to facilitate a positive experience during each customer interaction. Make sure they understand why loyalty is so important and encourage them to contribute their own ideas to help bring your brand to life.

5 Critical Steps to Loyalty Success

1. Define your program strategy
2. Gain internal alignment
3. Train your team
4. Measure and track performance
5. Continually refine to improve results

Training Investment = Loyalty Success

For Store Managers

- Tie program performance to store manager compensation packages
- Create incentives to promote loyalty execution
- Include loyalty in the evaluation process for store performance
- Develop personalized store goals to reward managers for improvements

For Store Associates

- Incentivize all employees to actively use your loyalty program
- Create employee-specific offers to encourage program familiarity
- Provide consistent training—both onboarding and refreshers
- Give clear direction on how to engage customers about loyalty

How Soon Will Customers Join Your Program?

There's no magic number for how many times a consumer sees a loyalty program before joining. However, some statistics provide insights into loyalty behavior:

78% of consumers would consider joining a loyalty program after shopping with a brand five or fewer times
20% of consumers report being open to joining after just one shopping experience
20% of Gen Z consumers say they would need to shop with a brand at least 10 times before joining

Source: Cordial

Your Loyalty Menu Makeover? Serving Up Foodservice.

Looking for a smart way to satisfy your cravings for customer acquisition, retention, and overall profitability? Prioritizing foodservice in your loyalty program can quickly elevate your customer experience. Consider working with CPG brands on discounted pairings, such as your fresh prepared meals combined with a vendor-discounted beverage.

Attract more customers

Expand your foodservice options to compete more effectively with QSRs and grocery stores, incentivizing repeat visits.

- -

Serve diverse consumer needs with meal kits, combo meals, quick snacks, and a wide range of beverage options.

Tap into changing behaviors

Create a frictionless experience that highlights foodservice offers through online ordering, mobile apps, and self-checkout platforms.

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Offer more fresh, healthy, and diverse foods—partnering with popular brands or local food providers.
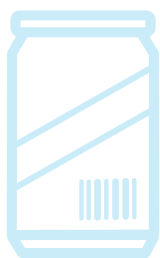
Increase revenue and profits

Focus on promoting higher-margin categories like fresh prepared food, meal kits, and grab-and-go options.

- -

Increase basket size and create more predictable revenue streams with bundles, subscriptions, and prepaid foodservice options.

Double-Digit Growth Opportunity

Use marketplace aggregators for online ordering and delivery through platforms like DoorDash, Uber Eats, and Grubhub:

- > **$353.3B** US online food delivery market in 2024
- > **2.5B** global online ordering platform users by 2027
- > **$1.9T** global online food delivery market by 2029

Source: CloudKitchens, CAKE POS, and Toast

Targeting the Right Demographics

54% of Millennials are enrolled or active c-store loyalty program users.

81% of Millennials say that joining a loyalty program increased their spending with that brand.

46% of Gen Z say they have a strong connection or loyalty to a brand.

77% of Gen Z say they regularly try new brands.

Source: BusinessDasher, PDI Technologies

Are You Using These Tools to Optimize Loyalty?

Want to maximize your loyalty investment? Look for key areas that deliver high ROI, including advanced tools, new program capabilities, and expanded offerings.

Although the right technology platform is critical for loyalty program success, you also need a holistic methodology, the right skills, and the expertise to manage everything effectively.

Gain Efficiency through Consolidation

Simplify loyalty program management by leveraging an integrated technology platform, a common source of data, and a unified user experience. In addition to consistency advantages, you can benefit from a single system connecting everything from the POS and back office to electronic shelf labels and digital promotions.

Move Faster with Payment Flexibility

If you give your customers flexible ways to pay, they're more likely to participate in your loyalty program. Consumers are increasingly adopting mobile payments, tapping their phone to pay, and using Private Label Debit (PLD). These options can help speed up transactions and the availability of program benefits.

Excel with Advanced Technologies

Elevating your loyalty program often requires technology advancements, such as AI. AI can help you take a data–driven approach with predictive analytics that help identify and predict individual customer preferences. It can also help you automate targeted communications and promotions to optimize your loyalty results.

Elevating "Foodvenience"

As c-stores increasingly compete with QSRs and fast food chains, foodservice has become a vital part of loyalty program success.

Why Consolidate?

Integrating inventory, pricebook, loyalty, and payments across a single platform streamlines operational efficiency, simplifies processes, and increases vendor accountability.

10 Loyalty Metrics to Track Performance

	Metric	What It Measures
1.	**Loyalty penetration rate**	The percentage of total transactions made by loyalty members
2.	**Visit frequency per member**	How often loyalty members return during a given period
3.	**Average spend per loyalty member**	The average transaction value for loyalty members
4.	**Offer redemption rate**	The percentage of offers redeemed versus those distributed
5.	**Customer retention rate**	How many loyalty members stay active over a given timeframe
6.	**Loyalty ROI**	Total program ROI: often calculated as (incremental revenue – program costs) / program costs
7.	**Enrollment growth**	The number of new members added during a campaign or over a given period of time
8.	**Account registration rate**	The percentage of loyalty members who have fully registered their accounts
9.	**Active member growth**	The number of actively engaged loyalty members added over a given time period
10.	**Average loyalty transactions per store**	The average number of loyalty transactions per store over a specific period of time

Collaborate with CPG Brands

CPG brands are eager to partner with convenience retailers. This type of third-party offer funding can help you expand your loyalty program in a cost-effective manner.

Extend your reach
Explore mutually beneficial relationships with cross-brand advantages that increase the overall value of your loyalty program.

Create a reward ecosystem
Participate in broader third-party loyalty programs and retail media networks so your customers can earn rewards across multiple brand offerings.

Engage your community
Work with local or regional businesses to give your loyalty program a community feel, infusing your stores and offers with local flavor.

5 Ways You Can Use Data to Improve Results

1. Clearly define your business goals and KPIs

2. Develop a strategy to capture relevant customer data

3. Implement an agile platform linked to the source data

4. Leverage data to deliver personalized, real-time content

5. Validate outcomes to meet business goals and KPIs

About PDI Loyalty Solutions

PDI delivers innovative consumer engagement solutions that take a data-driven approach to loyalty so you can deliver an exceptional customer experience. Hundreds of retailers use PDI Loyalty solutions to create personalized, digital experiences for their customers.

The new PDI Experience Designer solution is a powerful self-service platform that helps you create personalized, omnichannel loyalty campaigns. Leverage an easy-to-use customer engagement tool, templates, and data-driven insights to quickly launch targeted promotions, product recommendations, and customer communications—without having to add resources.

Start Today

Want More Loyalty Resources?

Access the latest loyalty trends, tips, news, and best practices with **C-Store Loyalty Insider**

Achieving Sustainable Loyalty Success

Modernizing your loyalty program requires the right combination of technology platform, data/insights, and industry expertise. If you don't have experienced loyalty experts in your own organization, look for a reputable partner that can fill knowledge gaps, share loyalty best practices, and help benchmark your results.

About PDI Technologies

With 40 years of industry leadership, PDI Technologies, Inc. resides at the intersection of productivity and sales growth, delivering powerful solutions that serve as the backbone of the convenience retail and petroleum wholesale ecosystem. By "Connecting Convenience" across the globe, we empower businesses to increase productivity, make informed decisions, and engage faster with their customers.

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