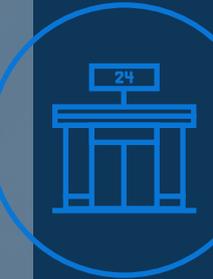




# convenience store trends shaping the future of CX





Between rapidly evolving expectations + behaviors and the ongoing consumer-led digital transformation, 2020 has been a landmark year of changes and operational challenges for the c-store industry.

While many COVID-specific trends will fade over time, some changes ushered in by the pandemic *are* here to stay. Brands need to be aware of how these changes are impacting the customer experience — and use their experience management (XM) programs to keep pace.

We've used research from US + UK consumers to outline **4 forward-looking trends** to keep top-of-mind when planning for 2021 — and **3 takeaways** that will help c-store brands improve CX.

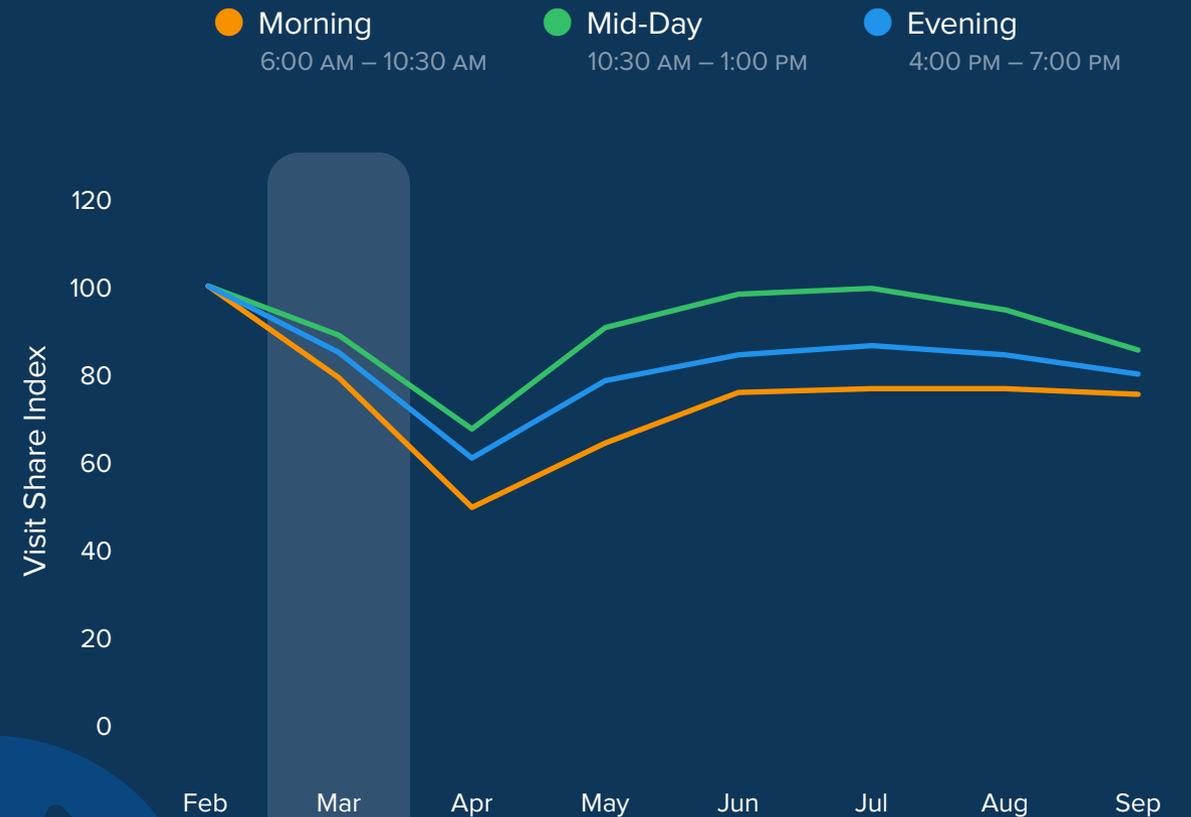


## TREND #1

# Traffic patterns will remain altered amid disrupted routines

Ongoing safer-at-home policies have led to decreased visits relative to pre-pandemic averages, particularly during the morning and evening dayparts with former commuters now working from home. While travel plans have been largely put on hold, those looking to get away are opting for road trips over air travel—which presents c-store brands with an opportunity to recoup losses by finding innovative ways to win customer loyalty.

Traffic continues to lag pre-pandemic averages, with morning and evening dayparts seeing the most significant dips



**-200%**  
YOY decrease in air travel since the onset of the pandemic

TREND #2

# Mobile apps + loyalty programs will remain a priority to drive visit share

As health concerns rose, customers quickly turned to contactless touchpoints like paying at the pump and engaging with branded mobile apps — which offer the added benefit of earning loyalty points for future visits. If you're still deciding where to invest resources in 2021, these digital engagement channels are a safe bet.



64% of U.S. stores offer loyalty programs  
★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★  
compared to  
46% of non-U.S. stores\*  
★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

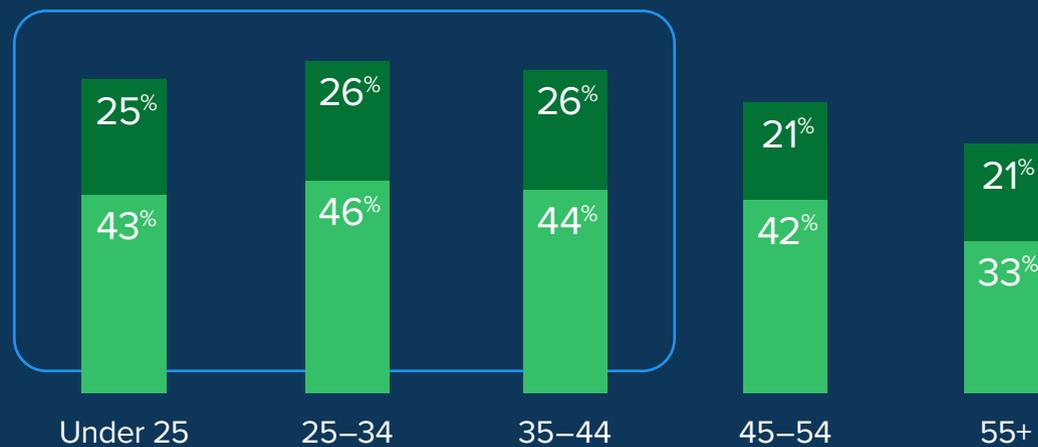
\*PDI | C-store Shopper Report: Exploring the Global Convenience Retail Environment | September 2020

# Trend to watch in 2021: Will scan-and-go shopping gain global traction?

Retail giants like Amazon and Walmart have been experimenting with scan-and-go store models since 2018, but broader adoption across the U.S. has been virtually non-existent compared to UK markets. However, our research shows awareness and consideration growing, especially among younger demographics.

## Interest in scan-and-go shopping is higher among younger demographics

● Interested  
● Very Interested



**56%**  
of consumers are  
aware of scan-and-go  
technology

**30%**  
of respondents have  
tried scan-and-go  
shopping

**94%**  
Overall Satisfaction  
with scan-and-go  
experience

TREND #3

# To drive profitable sales growth, c-stores will continue trying to take visit share from QSR brands

The razor-thin profit margins on fuel and CPG items has already inspired many leading c-store brands to differentiate on made-to-order food + drink offerings in recent years. To drive repeat visits and win customer loyalty, brands will have to focus on key drivers like order accuracy and speed of service.

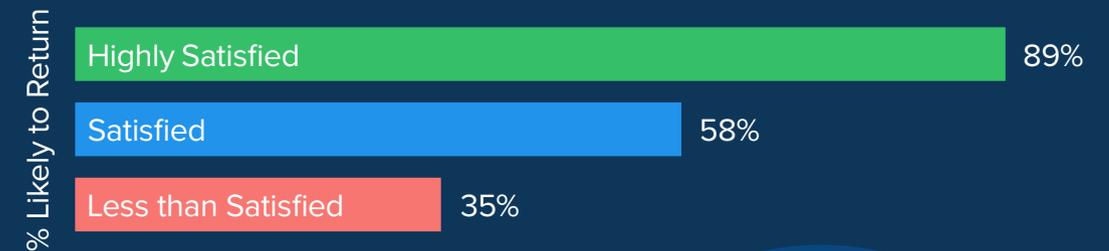


#### TREND #4

# Elevated expectations for cleanliness will continue amid heightened health + safety concerns

While the pandemic ushered in higher standards across industries, c-stores will have to keep staff focused on upholding PPE protocols in stores and maintaining a clean environment—particularly in high-traffic areas like restrooms and drink stations.

When customers are less than satisfied with cleanliness inside of a c-store, they're less likely to return



**55%**

of consumers say cleanliness matters more when deciding to visit a c-store now compared to before the pandemic

**3 in 4**

consumers say restroom cleanliness impacts their decision to purchase products when visiting a c-store



# 3 takeaways to help convenience stores improve CX in 2021

1

Focus digital strategies around feature-rich mobile apps + loyalty program adoption

C-stores must accelerate their digital transformation strategies and create a loyalty program that rewards frequent customers.

2

Prioritize health + safety with an emphasis on cleanliness

Amplify cleanliness standards—and communicate these efforts—to demonstrate commitment to protecting employees and customers alike.

3

Differentiate with made-to-order menu innovations

With the uptick in foodservice customers across the industry, delivering on accuracy, speed, and taste will convert infrequent guests to brand loyalists.

## Navigate the digital transformation without compromising on CX

If your digital transformation strategy still isn't producing significant ROI, it may be time for a revamp. Download the best practice guide to see 5 common pitfalls to avoid and 3 trends to adopt now.



[GET THE GUIDE ►](#)

# As the customer journey changes, stay connected at every turn

SMG works with more than 500 of the world's leading brands—including 85% of NRN's Top 20 restaurants and 30% the NRF's top 20 retailers. By combining end-to-end measurement solutions with integrated reporting tools and hands-on professional services, we help c-stores navigate uncertainty with precision and adapt with agility.

To learn more, visit [www.smg.com/request-a-demo](http://www.smg.com/request-a-demo).

## About Service Management Group

SMG inspires experiences that improve people's lives. We are a catalyst for change, providing actionable customer, patient, and employee insights that boost loyalty and drive business outcomes. Our unique model puts a dual focus on platform technology and professional services—making it easier to collect, analyze, and share feedback and behavioral data across the enterprise. To learn more about our customer experience management, employee experience, and brand research solutions, visit [www.smg.com](http://www.smg.com).

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How can your brand deliver safe service that builds trust? Watch this webinar to learn how to earn (and keep) customer loyalty and how top brands are adapting their XM strategies.



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