Consumer Behavior

9 Habits of Gas-Buying Customers

April 2019
9 Habits of Gas-Buying Customers

With about 40 million Americans purchasing gas every day, they’re bound to reveal some interesting behaviors at the pump.

1 HABIT #1
Consumers typically decide to buy gas when...

- Perhaps often, because they keep the tank as full as possible (17%)
- The gas indicator light comes on (11%)
- They’re going inside the store to buy something (1%)
- Creature of habit! They always buy gas on a specific day/time (4%)
- They see a cheap gas price (9%)
- 58% They’re running low and it’s convenient to stop

11% 9% 4% 1%
HABIT #2
Mid-day is a popular time to fill up.

For the past two years, the mid-day (10 am - 3 pm) daypart has been the most popular time to fill up.

While men don’t show a preference for when they buy gas, **women are most likely to buy gas mid-day (40%)**, and Boomers (age 65+) **overwhelmingly buy gas mid-day (61%)**.
HABIT #3
Gas price determines where consumers shop.

What’s the most important factor in selecting where to buy gas?

- Price: 59%
- Location of store/station: 23%
- Brand: 10%
- Ease of entrance or exit: 4%
- Quality of in-store items: 3%

Price is the No. 1 factor in why consumers selected a specific location to fill up.
HABIT #4
Consumers largely rely on the gas price sign.

Drivers shop for gas based on:

- The store’s loyalty card or other gas discount: 16%
- The store’s reputation for low prices: 11%
- The price posted on website: 9%
- The store’s gas price sign: 63%

Most millennial drivers (68%) who need to refuel decide by looking at the store’s gas price sign.
HABIT #5
Consumers pay for gas with plastic.

78% of consumers pay for their gas with a credit or debit card.

Method consumers typically use to buy gas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>1%</th>
<th>2%</th>
<th>3%</th>
<th>4%</th>
<th>5%</th>
<th>6%</th>
<th>7%</th>
<th>8%</th>
<th>9%</th>
<th>10%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cash</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>&lt;35</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debit</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>&lt;35</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>35-49</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>50-64</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>65+</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Millennials are most likely to pay for gas with a debit card (52%) while Boomers prefer to use a credit card (68%). Cash continues to decline as a payment method for gas.
9 Habits of Gas-Buying Customers

HABIT #6
When consumers refuel, they fill up.

Consumers buying gas typically:

- Fill the tank: 70%
- Purchase enough gas for the money budgeted: 13%
- Spend the amount that’s on hand: 11%
- Buy a set gallon amount each time: 5%
- Spend the amount leftover from another purchase: 2%

Consumers under age 35 are the least likely to fill the tank (60%) while most Boomers do fill up (90%).
HABIT #7
Almost half of all gas-buying customers go inside the store.

Men are more likely to go inside the convenience store than women (52% versus 36%), and consumers age 35-49 are most likely to shop inside the store (50%). Boomers are the least likely to shop inside the store: 70% say no!

And here’s what gas-buying customers typically purchase inside the store (multiple responses permitted):

- Gas at the register: 45%
- Beverage: 42%
- Snack: 37%
- Lottery tickets: 23%
- Cigarettes: 21%
- Grocery items: 11%
- Beer/wine: 11%
- Buy a sandwich: 7%
HABIT #8
Customers do not shop for gas in the same order.

Some prefer to buy gas first, while others prefer to go inside the store and then buy gas:

And here’s what they do with their vehicle:

- **45%** Leave it at the pump after fueling
- **34%** Re-park after fueling
- **20%** Leave it at the pump while it actively refueling [and go inside the store]

Regional differences:
Compared to the rest of the United States, **Midwesterners** leave their vehicle at the pump after they fill most of the time (71%), while consumers in the **Northeast** are most likely to repark and free up a fueling position after they buy gas (50%).
Consumers typically eat the sandwich or meal they purchased:

- **60%** inside the car
- **27%** at their destination
- **12%** at the store/use in-store seating

83% of the food, drinks and snacks bought at a convenience store are consumed within the first hour of purchase.

Across the board, inside the car reigns supreme among today’s time-starved, on-the-go shoppers.
About NACS

NACS (convenience.org) advances the role of convenience stores as positive economic, social and philanthropic contributors to the communities they serve. The U.S. convenience store industry, with more than 153,000 stores nationwide selling fuel, food and merchandise, serves 165 million customers daily—half of the U.S. population—and has sales that are 11% of total U.S. retail and foodservice sales. NACS has 1,900 retailer and 1,800 supplier member companies from more than 50 countries.

Survey Methodology: NACS has surveyed consumers about their perceptions related to gas prices since 2007. The NACS Consumer Fuels Survey is conducted by noted marketing and polling firm PSB. A total of 1,101 fuels consumers nationwide were surveyed over the period of January 17-23, 2019, and consumers reported a median gas price nationally of $2.23. The margin of error for the study is +/- 2.95 at the 95% confidence level.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Jeff Lenard
Vice President, Strategic Industry Initiatives
703.518.4272
jlenard@convenience.org

Chris Blasinsky
Content Communications Strategist
703.518.4296
cblasinsky@convenience.org