



# GHRA In Action

OUR MEMBERS ARE OUR MISSION!

VOL. 11 | MAY 2024

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# BUILDING A BIGGER BRAND FOR



**FIRST 25  
STORES ONLY**

Marketing fee - \$0.00  
Licensing fee - \$0.00  
Opening a KUDOS - PRICELESS

There's more!

**Only 1% Usage Fee**

**In addition to waiving the licensing and monthly fee,  
you will enjoy a fee of only 1% of gross sales not to exceed  
\$1000/month**

\*The usage fee will remain unchanged over a period of sixty months from the date of execution of an agreement.

For more information email us at [jreeder@ghraonline.com](mailto:jreeder@ghraonline.com)





# A NOTE FROM THE CEO

BRIAN TROUT, CEO

Greetings Members, and welcome to May!

This past month, GHRA and GHRCF held our annual charity golf outing at Sweetwater Country Club to raise funds for the families of fallen Police Officers and First Responders. Every year, our outing continues to grow, and we are very thankful for the support of our vendors partners, members, and guests who participated. This year, GHRCF raised close to \$120,000 to support the families of fallen police officers and first responders.

May 1st marks my third anniversary as the CEO for GHRA. The first three years with the company have been full of challenges and growth. When I joined in May 2021, COVID was still a concern in the US, and we were just starting to experience the massive supply chain disruption caused by the global pandemic. We managed our way through the “great resignation,” significant inflationary, and the rising labor costs. During these tumultuous three years, GHRA has been able to grow the member DSD platform rebates significantly, expand the warehouse rebates, improve the energy aggregation platform (saving members collectively millions of dollars in energy prices), been able to return to members 25% of the Store Participation Deposit, and issue two separate multi-million dollar patronage payments to members, and we added two additional business lines to our portfolio of companies; KUDOS and GHRA Fuels. Over the past three years, GHRA’s annual trade show and annual golf tournament has also grown exponentially. GHRA has been featured in the national NACS magazine and is getting attention from the convenience store industry for the great work being done here in Southeast Texas. Further, GHRA has taken a strong investment posture with our IT systems, data security, and business infrastructure capability by upgrading our Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software, the Warehouse Management System, and POS systems in the warehouse, upgrading our fleet of delivery trucks, and expanding our refrigerated and freezer space. These investments are preparing GHRA for even more growth over the next few years.

I have enjoyed this journey, and I am very excited for what the next few years hold for GHRA and continuing the grow trajectory we are on as we enhance the value of GHRA and its importance to the Houston community.

Thank you for your commitment to GHRA, and I wish you all continued blessings!

Sincerely,

*Brian Trout*

OUR MEMBERS ARE OUR MISSION!



# Save money by purchasing fuels through GHRA Fuels

We're a fuel distributor specializing in high-quality, cost-effective **unbranded fuel**. By uniting the purchasing strength of all our members, we aim to expand our supply services to a broader customer base with the primary goal of passing on the benefits to our members.

To learn more and sign up for GHRA Fuels, please contact

**Imraan Nabi - Director of Fuels**

(281) 295-5342 | [Inabi@ghraonline.com](mailto:Inabi@ghraonline.com)

**Donald Taylor - Fuels Territory Manager**

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Sign up now by scanning the QR Code

# In This Issue

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47 *Partners* IN ACTION

# Welcome Members

*On behalf of the Board of Directors and staff at GHRA,  
please welcome our new members:*

AIRWAY

RELIANCE

SHOP N CARRY #1

SMILEY'S EXPRESS #9

BIG MART #12

ZIP IN ZIP OUT

FUEL MAXX #81

BIG MART #13

GAS-N-GO FOOD MART

A&M CONVENIENCE STORE & MORE

QUICK BOLT

FUEL MAXX #92

BUYBITE

CHECK POINT

SJ SPANCER FOOD MART

SWIFT



WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH 2024

# HOUSTON BUSINESS JOURNAL

“PEOPLE ON THE MOVE”



Saima Maredia joined the Greater Houston Retailers Cooperative Association in 2007 and quickly rose through the ranks by demonstrating exceptional leadership and technical expertise. As the finance manager, Maredia oversees financial operations to ensure accuracy, compliance, and best financial practices. She is also responsible for training accounting staff. Maredia embraces GHRA's 'people first' philosophy and helps to nurture a family-like workplace environment.

**SAIMA MAREDIA**

ASSISTANT CONTROLLER  
GREATER HOUSTON RETAILERS COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION, INC.



Romina Kadiwal joined the Greater Houston Retailers Cooperative Association in 2001 when she was 18 and is now the senior most executive team member. She has contributed significantly to the growth and success of GHRA and its membership. As the director of HR and administration, Kadiwal leads HR initiatives, fosters employee development, and addresses compliance and risk management requirements. She has helped to increase employee retention and establish GHRA as an employer of choice.

**ROMINA KADIWAL**

DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES  
AND ADMINISTRATION  
GREATER HOUSTON RETAILERS COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION, INC.

IN OBSERVANCE OF  
**MEMORIAL DAY**  
MAY 27<sup>TH</sup> 2024

THE GHRA CORPORATE OFFICE WILL BE **CLOSED**.

THE GHRA WAREHOUSE CASH & CARRY WILL REMIAN **OPEN** FROM 8:30 AM TO 3:30 PM

DELIVERIES WILL BE MADE PER NORMAL SCHEDULE



# FDA Launches Searchable Database for Tobacco Products

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) launched the Searchable Tobacco Products Database, a new user-friendly list of tobacco products including e-cigarettes that may be legally marketed in the United States.

The database will be updated monthly with items that are newly approved for marketing as well as older products that have already gotten the go-ahead from the FDA.

The database provides information on three categories of products:

- New tobacco products that received marketing authorization through one of FDA's three pathways to market a new tobacco product.
- Pre-existing tobacco products established through a voluntary determination program (commercially marketed as of Feb. 15, 2007).
- Provisional tobacco products that were removed from review.

**Members are urged to utilize the Searchable Tobacco Products Database to assist in complying with the law**



**Scan QR code to access the database**





# Enhancing the Shopping Experience: *The Evolution of Merchandising Strategies*

In the dynamic realm of retail, understanding consumer behavior is paramount.

By CSP Daily News

As the world navigated the challenges of the pandemic, convenience store owners found themselves reassessing their shelf layouts. With fluctuations in consumer preferences and shopping patterns, the need for adaptable strategies became apparent. Questions from retailers arose regarding the optimal placement of products and the impact of available size variations on purchasing decisions.

Collaboration with retail partners lies at the heart of the approach set forth by The Hershey Company. The company created its Gold Standard Merchandising Principles nearly 14 years ago. These principles, also known as the Gold Standard Planogram, have been at the forefront of this understanding. Designed to elevate sales across the candy, mint and gum categories, the approach prioritizes consumer satisfaction and retailer profitability.

By analyzing market dynamics and performance metrics, tailored recommendations are made to optimize category space. The aim is to create an environment where shoppers can easily locate their desired products, thereby enhancing their overall shopping experience.

To validate the effectiveness of these principles in today's dynamic environment, The Hershey Company put its Gold Standard Merchandising Principles to the test. Virtual reality

simulations and in-market trials were conducted, evaluating various pricing and placement strategies. The results reaffirmed the resilience of our approach, demonstrating significant incremental growth for retailers.

Insights gleaned from these tests also addressed pertinent inquiries from retailers. For instance, the importance of offering a mix of king and standard-size bars was underscored, catering to diverse consumer preferences. This flexibility enhances choice and drives value for shoppers seeking convenience-store snacks.

It is worth noting that the commitment to these principles transcends brand allegiance. The focus remains steadfast on optimizing category performance, irrespective of specific brand affiliations. By prioritizing consumer satisfaction and category growth, retailers aim to foster a retail environment conducive to new discoveries and loyal indulgences.

Understanding the consumer is critical. By aligning with consumer preferences and market dynamics, retailers can maximize sales potential while enhancing the shopping experience. As store owners navigate a constantly changing retail landscape, these principles remain steadfast, driving growth and prosperity for all stakeholders involved. ■





# Five Takeaways From CDA Marketplace 2024

Consumers are looking for value this year, as well as new products that cater to their dietary and flavor preferences.

By CS News

ghraonline.com

The Convenience Distribution Association's (CDA) 2024 Marketplace show brought together distributors, retailers and suppliers to network, discuss pain points and get ready for a year that promises both challenge and opportunity.

Here are some of Convenience Store News' top takeaways from the event:

## 1. Value > Price

Inflation may be slowing, but consumers still feel the economic pinch, and some are wary of a potential recession. During the remainder of 2024, retailers and distributors must focus on value and giving consumers what they want.

Paul Reilly, a sales expert, speaker and writer, noted that if customers view something as a need, they will be more likely to focus on price. Value-added selling can help companies leverage their expertise, reputation, capability, longevity and other attributes for long-term benefit.

## 2. Fresh, Healthy & Simple Are On the Rise

Less is more. Suppliers are ready to help convenience retailers meet consumers where they are by offering snackable fresh items. Seen on the show floor were Arctic Apples' packaged apple slices, which offer a fresh-cut taste and a multiweek shelf life, and product lines like Bob's Bars, which feature short, simple ingredient lists. C-stores have ample opportunities to cater to both health-minded consumers and spur-of-the-moment snackers.

## 3. Plant-Based is Still Growing

Similar to healthy snacks, plant-based prepared food items may be niche, but they're still on the menu. Companies such as Conagra Brands are switching up c-store classics with products like its Gardein line of Chick'n Tenders. Retailers should conduct detailed market research, so they know their market inside out and can gauge whether meat alternatives are worth offering.

## 4. Brand Extensions Are Getting Creative

Candy and snack brands, which drive a majority of impulse purchases at c-stores, are coming up with new ways for consumers to enjoy more of what they already like — with a twist. At the show, Mars Wrigley showcased Skittles Littles, a tinier version of the classic, while its Snickers brand has a new Snickers Pecan variety. A Snickers Hi-Protein Bar is also available for those who want a functional version of their favorite candy bar.

## 5. Spicy is Still In

No change here — whether it's a Generation Z-driven preference or just a long-running trend, spicy flavors are expected to sell well in 2024 across numerous snack categories. This includes jerky as brands roll out more meat snacks flavored with red pepper, chili and other seasonings that bring the heat. ■



# Train Employees to De-Escalate Difficult Situations

When you run a convenience store, you have control over certain aspects of the business. Products, store layout, employees, and policies—all are carefully considered and chosen. Your customers, however, will always be a wild card. You can't control who's having a good or bad day, or anything else going on in their lives. What you can control, with proper training, is how your team handles the customers that try to take those emotions out on your store.

*By Ready Training Online*

## ***Prepare Your Team for Any Situation***

Your employees need to know how to respond to intense situations — and keeping customers calm can go a lot further than you might think. Some ways de-escalation training can benefit to your store include:

### ***Keeping Your Employees Safe***

De-escalating a situation with an angry customer means finding a peaceful resolution and avoiding a potentially more dangerous incident. This could save your employees from any further verbal, and possibly even physical, abuse. When the alternative is so drastic, your team will appreciate training on how to avoid escalation. Training will provide them with the confidence they need to respond quickly and appropriately.

### ***Protecting Your Customers***

When a situation escalates, your employees aren't the only ones in danger. Other customers could also be in harm's way. An altercation between one customer and another can be just as bad for your business as one between a customer and employee. If the situation isn't handled properly, customers not directly involved could find themselves in

harm's way. Giving your employees the training they need to act as a mediator in these situations is crucial to protecting innocent bystanders and preventing a more serious incident.

### ***Protecting Your Store***

You and your team put a lot of work into your store! Unfortunately, it only takes one angry customer a couple seconds to cause a big mess. Tipping over displays, throwing beverages, knocking things off shelves; all these actions are disruptive to your store's operations. If your employees can calm the situation before tempers rise this much, they might be saving your store from damage and a lot of cleaning up afterwards.

These are all tangible benefits that avoid serious injury and destruction. But there's also an intangible benefit to running a safe store: leaving a good impression on your shoppers. Customers won't return to stores where they feel unsafe. Preparing your team to take control of situations and prevent escalated incidents will make customers feel more comfortable while visiting your store. This will certainly help your store gain customer loyalty on top of the other benefits. ■





# The Future of Technology Integration in Convenience Store Food Service

Tech solutions are helping convenience stores deliver restaurant-quality food as part of an overdue image reboot.

By Forbes

In the age of convenience and customization, diversifying gas stations is becoming big business. In fact, food service now accounts for over 36% of in-store gross margin at gas stations nationwide. Apart from offering high-margin goods like beverages, snacks and grocery items, many gas stations and convenience stores have turned to technological advancements in food ordering and preparation to serve made-to-order breakfast, lunch and dinner items on-site.

Self-order kiosks are increasingly driving higher checkout totals and margins through operational efficiencies.

These developments have changed the definition of convenience on the road. Convenience stores once meant efficient—but low quality. Today, they can deliver the full customer experience. Gone are the days of gas stations offering only soda machines and dirty restrooms. The



leading players in this space are not just remaking the image of gas stations, but raising the stakes (and quality) for everyone.

## ***Not Just Fueling up on Gas***

Convenience stores sell an estimated 80% of the fuel purchased in the U.S. Total fuel sales increased 41.2% to \$603.2 billion in 2022, mostly due to higher gas prices. However, a Fortune study found that the advertised gas prices can be misleading and stations generally earn less as prices rise. Their net profit per gallon after expenses is about \$0.03-\$0.07, and the net profit margin of a gas station overall is less than 2%.

This relatively low margin partly explains the growth of food service and merchandise sales, as stores focus on ways to boost income. In 2022, prepared food accounted for 67.3% of all food service sales. As demand grows, technology solutions are helping operators streamline operations, produce meals to order, and improve food safety and quality. People have simply come to expect this form of convenience, and it represents the next logical evolution for gas stations and convenience stores.

## ***The Road Ahead for Convenience Stores***

Integrating this new technology is not without its challenges as stores attempt to adapt to new customer expectations. Independent franchisees own many locations, so it can be difficult to get buy-in and roll out new solutions uniformly across a network.

Legacy systems can also lack the modularity and flexibility to make the transition a seamless process. In fact, the longer a legacy system has been in place, the more resistance there can be because of fears that the entire system will be brought down—with the associated loss of revenue.

It can be a slow and cumbersome process to modernize when stores have added hardware on an ad hoc basis over time. However, this technology is here to stay. We suggest making incremental updates and iterations to keep the systems modern rather than trying to do a full overhaul all at once. This kind of staged approach may be necessary as convenience stores seek a point of difference in a crowded marketplace.

## ***Innovation and Adoption of Tech***

Convenience stores cannot afford to fall behind industry trends. One study of 2,000 U.S. consumers found that 80% of in-store shoppers preferred nontraditional checkout options like self-service. Yum Brands, the multinational fast-food corporation, expects in-store kiosks to become ubiquitous at its brand stores worldwide by 2026. Currently, all of its U.S. Taco Bell locations feature kiosks, and they increased their kiosk penetration in KFC restaurants by 70% over the past year outside of China.

New innovations such as these will allow gas station chains to set themselves apart from the competition, as long as they adopt early and commit to constant improvement as it evolves.

## ***Tech—the Point of Difference***

Great customer experience, designed through modern technology, can create a lasting impression. For example, a self-order kiosk along with tech-driven quality control systems—such as temperature monitoring, traceability and food tracking—can elevate a gas station's reputation.

The modularity of tech systems also allows for ongoing innovation. Point-of-sale systems can track sales data and inventory levels, as well as automatically reorder stock; while self-order kiosks can be integrated with a kitchen display system for a total solution that can be built over time. The capacity of these screens to act as digital signage and a menu board can effectively help turn gas stations into miniature restaurants.

These developments will likely have a positive impact on the bottom line. Kiosks can drive a higher check and higher margins by upselling consumers or improving visibility into more options. The footprint of this tech will only continue to grow.

## ***The Customer Experience Is Driving Growth***

Providing the same customization that we have all become accustomed to in quick-serve restaurants is having a positive impact on service stations and fast making their old image outdated. In today's age, people on the road will stop in for the food, the ease of service and the overall experience. This kind of success has redefined customer convenience for gas stations and convenience stores nationwide—and for the early adopters of the tech enabling this transformation, there will be no turning around. ■