



GHRA In Action

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Welcome Members

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

QUICK N EASY #3	STOP N SERV #2	PRASLA'S	ANDERSON FOOD MART	FUEL MAXX #80	WAVES FOOD MART
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4 Candy Trends for C-Stores to Watch

While sales have declined thanks to price-sensitive shoppers, the category still has some bright spots, experts say.

By C-Store Dive

Despite a decline in sweets sales at c-stores and other retailers in 2024, the future for c-store candy sales looks bright, experts say.

"Candy serves as a mental wellbeing option for many consumers because of its emotional connection," said Sally Lyons Wyatt, global executive vice president and chief advisor of consumer goods and foodservice insights at Circana. "It's fun to eat. It makes us happy. Eaten in moderation, candy can be an inexpensive joy maker."

But while this category still has a strong presence in the U.S. — candy sales hit \$54 billion in 2024 and are expected to reach \$70 billion by 2029, according to the National Confectioners Association (NCA)'s 2025 State of Treating report — it was hit by the same double whammy of higher prices and worried consumers that have affected most retailers over the past few years.

Overall c-store candy sales declined 2.2% to \$8.3 billion for the year ending Feb. 23, according to Circana, while unit sales dropped 5.9%. The shortfall is due to lower overall sales and traffic to c-stores, according to Lyons Wyatt.

Confectionery sales across all types of retailers also declined 5% in units in 2024 — decreasing 3.3% for chocolate, 0.3% for nonchocolate and 2.2% for gum, according to the NCA report.

"It is a difficult macro environment. [Consumers] tell us they

are stressed, worse off financially than they were 12 months ago," said Nick Snow, senior vice president of decision science and analysis at Dollar General, at the Circana Growth Summit in Orlando.

However, Snow noted that consumers are willing to treat themselves with small expenses such as candy bars.

"People always take advantage of that extra candy bar at the front end."

Balancing value with treating

The NCA report found that, while consumers are concerned about the price of all groceries, 98% of shoppers said they purchased confectionery products at some point in 2024.

"Innovations in chocolate and candy today will continue to attract consumers and meet them where they want to be met long after inflation has stabilized," said Christopher Gindlesperger, senior vice president of public affairs and communications for NCA.

Consumers are making difficult decisions to balance their budgets, which includes drawbacks on many discretionary categories, like candy, Lyons Wyatt noted. However, "there are several pockets of growth — especially within nonchocolate," she added.

Balancing budgets is helping premium and super premium varieties of candy grow alongside private brands, according

to Lyons Wyatt. Across all retailers, private label candy sales declined last year, but retailers saw small growth in novelty nonchocolate candy, licorice, breath fresheners, seasonal nonchocolate Halloween candy and seasonal chocolate Valentine's Day and Easter candy.

"Candy serves as a mental wellbeing option for many consumers because of its emotional connection."

Since 71% of consumers rank price as a top-three purchase factor for candy, deals like two-for-one offers could boost sales. In fact, 59% of consumers reported they like those offers on candy, NCA found.

Limited time offers also draw traffic, excite consumers and help increase buy rates, Lyons Wyatt noted.

Sales of gummies, nonchocolate candy soar

While a little more than half of confectionary sales were driven by chocolate in 2024, nonchocolate candy saw the most year-over-year growth, up 4.9%. Gum and mints followed with a lift of 1.9%.

In fact, nonchocolate candy has grown by nearly \$5 billion since 2019 — an increase of almost 70% — and is expected to reach \$27 billion, the NCA report said.

Consumers turn to nonchocolate candies for many reasons, including flavors, shapes, textures like crunchy and chewy, innovations and functional benefits in some varieties, Lyons Wyatt said.

"They are fun to eat, provide experiential moments and can be eaten throughout the day," she said.

Nonchocolate sales were boosted by the popularity of sour candy last year, and nearly 11% of sales came from innovation, the NCA found.

"This trend is driven by Gen Z and millennial consumers who report loving exploration of all things sour, flavor mashups, different textures, and flavor experiences," said Gindlesperger.

Gummy candies are especially popular in c-stores, with major retailers such as 7-Eleven expanding their selection of private label gummies in the past couple of years. BP's Epic Goods line, launched last year, features several different kinds of regular and sour gummy candies, while Loop Neighborhood Market's Delish Candy and Snacks line sports a variety of gummy products.

7-Eleven even brought this popularity into other areas of the store with a Slurpee based on Shaquille O'Neal's line of sour gummies.

Additionally, more consumers are gravitating toward freeze-dried nonchocolate items, which "provide a different texture," Lyons Wyatt noted.

"The rest of 2025 has many headwinds for the convenience channel but I do think nonchocolate will be one of the bright lights for store traffic and sales, as long as consumers have money to spend," Lyons Wyatt said.

Retailers should ensure their candy aisle has a variety of sizes and types, to appeal to many different shoppers.

Give customers plenty of options

Candy makers are offering more variety in pack sizes and portion options than in the past — and consumers are responding, according to the NCA.

"Package size options and resealable packaging are particularly important to Gen Z and Millennial consumers, whose preferences are having a noticeable effect on confectionery," Gindlesperger said.

While consumers had been shifting from single-serve to multi-pack chocolate candy in the past couple of years, the trend is reversing "as consumers seek smaller multipacks at lower price points," Lyons Wyatt noted.

In addition to offering the right assortment and package sizes, c-stores should also make it more convenient for customers to buy candy. Across all types of retailers, there has been a surge in e-commerce candy sales, up 70% from 2021 to 2024, Lyons Wyatt said.

"Convenience retailers should ensure they have options for the trip into the store and/or delivery via their own offering or a third party."

Functional ingredient growth fueled by GLP-1 popularity

Both in candy and across the broader snacking universe, more consumers are seeking better-for-you options, according to Lyons Wyatt.

"All generations are fueling this trend, seeking products with 'less of' the ingredients they are trying to avoid and 'more of' ingredients they are leaning towards," she said.

This is being exacerbated by the rise in users of GLP-1 appetite-suppressing drugs. Roughly 1 in 6 U.S. households have at least one member using these medications, according to Jenna Freese, director of strategy at Numerator. These people are "looking for food that works harder — protein, shakes, jerky, kombucha, fresh meals, and right-sized portions," said Freese.

As a result, candies with package claims such as low sugar, USDA Organic, vegan, no high fructose corn syrup, no artificial sweeteners, natural flavors, no sugar alcohols, no synthetic colors, plant-based, and prebiotic fiber are performing well.

Still, it remains a niche interest. The NCA found that only 10% of respondents said they frequently purchase such items. ■



Economic Pressures & Downtrading Continue to Nag the Backbar

Goldman Sachs finds that while cigarette volume declines roll on, smokeless nicotine volumes are on the upswing.

By C-Store News

Similar to all categories in the convenience store, consumers' continued concerns over the economy are being reflected on the backbar.

"We are incrementally cautious on the U.S. tobacco/nicotine industry in the near term given increased pressure on the tobacco consumer from persistent inflation, pressure on discretionary incomes and tighter regulations, all of which are driving lower usage of cigarettes and further downtrading," said Bonnie Herzog, managing director at Goldman Sachs.

The observations are based on feedback from Goldman Sachs' first quarter "Nicotine Nuggets" survey, which represents roughly 48,000 retail locations across the United States (or roughly 32% of all tobacco outlets).

According to the survey, cigarette volume declines accelerated sequentially at higher rates in the first three months of 2025, reflecting increased pressure on the consumer as cigarette manufacturer pricing actions grow stronger, driving reduced tobacco purchase frequency and downtrading to more affordable noncombustible options.

Additionally, the outlook is more cautious. Retailers and wholesalers expressed concerns about consumers continuing to shift away from cigarettes or leave the category as they shift to other categories with cheaper price

points or quit altogether, which more retailers indicated in the first quarter survey.

Other key "Nicotine Nuggets" findings, according to Herzog, include:

- Downtrading pressure was strong in Q1 as inflationary pressures and weakening consumer sentiment weighed on consumer purchase decisions, driving a significant increase in market share of fourth tier/discount brands.
- Manufacturer pricing power is weakening relative to a year ago according to approximately 59% of survey respondents — although marginally lower from 61% in the Q4 2024 "Nicotine Nuggets" survey — with many highlighting that manufacturers are reaching a tipping point with consumers as brand loyalty is tested.
- Smokeless nicotine volume growth continued in Q1, led by modern oral nicotine brands ZYN and Rogue.
- Promotional activity is picking up but mostly in oral nicotine.

"Our survey respondents have grown significantly more cautious about the health of the adult tobacco/nicotine consumer with 53% indicating a more negative outlook, up sharply from our Q4 survey when only 26% indicated a weaker view," Herzog added. ■



Creating a Positive First Impression

By ReadyConvenience

Like a field in baseball, the condition of your store affects how well you and your team perform. Think of it this way – your success depends on the perceptions customers form about your operation. Like the saying goes, you never get a second chance to make a positive first impression. With effective training and proper maintenance, you can make sure every first impression is a good one.

ghraonline.com

Outside Your Store

Your parking lot, pump area, and the outside your store are the first areas your customers will come in contact with. If these areas are unkempt or unattractive, customers may lose their motivation to make the trip inside for a bite to eat or other items. To make a positive first impression outside your store, train your staff on cleaning the fuel pump, sweeping the parking lot, and other general exterior store care. On a regular basis, inspect the outside of your store for problems such as:

- Weeds, dead flowers, or litter in landscaped areas.
- Broken or non-working lighting, including in lighted signs.
- Outdated or unauthorized signage.
- Full trash cans on fuel islands.
- Empty or dirty squeegees, solvent, and paper towel dispensers.
- Hazards in pavement, such as cracks or holes.
- Dirty windows.
- Doors that stick or don't open properly.

Inside Your Store

When customers enter your store, what do they see? A clean and uncluttered store will make customers feel comfortable as they shop. To keep a positive first impression going on inside the store, train your staff on sales floor care, cleaning the shelves, and keeping the restroom clean. Keep an eye out for issues inside your store that will turn customers off and potentially cost you sales, such as:

- Shelves that are messy or poorly stocked.
- Items that are placed on incorrect shelves.
- Cluttered or disorganized checkout counters.
- Outdated or damaged promotional signs.
- Crowded or dirty aisles.

Product Merchandising

Your merchandising efforts will be more effective when the inside and outside of your store is well taken care of. Merchandising is more than just stocking products. It's about creating appealing displays that motivate a shopper to purchase an item on impulse or because it's being offered at a great value. Merchandising displays also help you highlight seasonal and new products. Pay attention to the details, and track sales of targeted items to ensure your merchandising efforts are paying off. ■



Convenience Stores That Invest in Food See More Foot Traffic

Chains like Wawa, Sheetz, Buc-ee's lead in foodservice, experience more and longer visits, R.J. Hottovy of Placer.ai says.

By CSP Daily News

Convenience stores with the most foot traffic are also leaders in food innovation.

This insight comes from R.J. Hottovy, head of analytical research at Los Altos, California-based location-analytics company Placer.ai, who spoke in April CSP's Dispensed Beverages Forum in Lombard, Illinois.

"What we're seeing is that those chains that really invest behind food programs, food quality, making it easier to access through mobile ordering or pickup windows, and loyalty programs have really been big among the winners in terms of year-over-year visitation trends," Hottovy said.

Maverik, helped by its acquisition of Kum & Go and rebranding, led the year-over-year change in visits by brand from 2023 to 2024, with a gain of more than 25%. The rest of the top 10, falling between 2% and 7% growth, were Buc-ee's, Kwik Trip, BJ's Gas, Meijer Gas Stations, Woodman's Gas, Sheetz, Wawa, Casey's and Coffee Cup Fuel Stop, Hottovy said.

Food leaders—Hottovy singled out Wawa, Sheetz, Buc-ee's and Casey's—have been outperforming the category.

In addition, these same food leaders are experiencing greater visits for breakfast and lunch dayparts. For example, these four chains outperform "total gas stations and c-stores" every hour starting at 7 a.m. through the noon hour, Hottovy said. Customers also stayed at their stores longer, he said.

The average dwell time for a gas station is 8 to 9 minutes, Hottovy said. The 2024 c-store food leaders and their median dwell times were:

- Buc-ee's: 20.3 minutes
- Sheetz: 11.5 minutes

- Wawa: 11.4 minutes
- 7-Eleven: 10.2 minutes
- Kwik Trip: 9.3 minutes
- Maverik: 9.2 minutes
- Circle K: 8.9 minutes
- Casey's 8.7 minutes

These chains "generally have a higher visitation trend, and there is a pretty direct correlation looking at dwell time and overall retail sales, so that is something as they spend more time in the store, maybe they're waiting for a food item to be made, there is an opportunity to cross-sell or upsell," he said.

Hottovy also said that growth in c-store visits might be increased by rates of loyal visitors.

The percentage of loyal customers who visited two-plus times a month:

- Wawa: 89.6% in 2024, 86.9% in 2019
- Casey's: 87.9% in 2024, 84.8% in 2019
- Circle K: 81.7% in 2024, 74.6% in 2019
- Cumberland Farms: 83.5% in 2024, 82.2% in 2019
- Kwik Trip: 94.5% in 2024, 90.7% in 2019
- Maverik: 80.9% in 2024, 72.0% in 2019
- Sheetz: 87.8% in 2024, 83.4% in 2019

"These food innovators are starting to see much more loyal, more people coming in twice a month, more people coming four times a month," Hottovy said. "So, again, food can be on a path toward loyalty. And I'm not saying anything that any of us doesn't know, but it's interesting to kind of tie the data to it." ■



Estimated Package Price Breakdown

License Agreement **\$7,500**

Equipment **\$65,000**

Smallwares **\$4,650**

Graphics **\$2,400**

Tiles **\$1,300**

TVs for Menu Board **\$3,000**

POS (POS, Scanner, Star Printer, FireSticks) **\$2,750**

Building Sign **\$3,250**

Building Sign Installation **\$1,350**

Permit **\$800**

Countertop **\$2,000**

🔥 Minimum Counter length 8.5 feet

🔥 2% Mark Usage Fee on Net Sales

🔥 High ROI, low upfront costs

🔥 Ongoing training and support

🔥 Most Owners have 2+ locations

🔥 Perfect for owners / operations



Scan the QR Code
for more details

FOR DETAILS CONTACT: DOUG BOONE | DBOONE@GHRAONLINE.COM | 281-295-5363



ESTIMATED PRICING BREAKDOWN

License Agreement - \$0.00
Equipment - \$20,000
Smallwares - \$2,000
Graphics - \$2,000
Menu Board - \$1,000
POS - \$2,750
Building Sign - \$3,250
Installation and Permit - \$2,000

*Minimum Counter Length 6 feet
No Mark Usage Fee*



Scan the QR Code
for Application

For details contact: Doug Boone
dboone@ghraonline.com | 281-295-5363



“I know of no single formula for success. But over the years I have observed that some attributes of leadership are universal and are often about finding ways of encouraging people to combine their efforts, their talents, their insights, their enthusiasm and their inspiration to work together.”

– Queen Elizabeth II



We Are Hiring!

Looking for an Exciting Career Opportunity?

Join GHRA Today!

GHRA is now hiring! We're looking for passionate, driven individuals ready to grow with us. Whether you're just starting out or looking to advance your career, we have open positions available now across multiple departments.

Scan the QR code to explore and apply for job openings.

