C-Store Menu Trends

Sandwiches, Mexican items and hot dogs are currently the most popular entrees on c-store menus, while breaded sides and fruit are the most common sides in the channel.

Technomic's MenuMonitor reports menu information from 32 U.S. retailers. The database tracks menu incidence, or number of menu items on c-store menus; the number of operators with a certain item on the menu; and operator penetration, or the percent of operators who have this item on the menu.

Entrees at C-Stores

PRODUCT CATEGORY	MENU INCIDENCE	OPERATORS OFFERING	OPERATOR PENETRATION	AVERAGE PRICE
Sandwiches and wraps	998	31	96.8%	$4.79
Mexican	199	29	90.6%	$3.02
Hot dogs	107	30	93.7%	$2.00
Pizza	107	18	56.2%	$5.46
Burgers	90	22	68.7%	$3.54
Salad main dish	80	18	56.2%	$5.41
Chicken dish	75	20	62.5%	$4.17
Pork dish	38	23	71.8%	$2.10
Combo plates	26	17	53.1%	$3.33
Breakfast starch	23	15	46.8%	$1.76
Pasta	11	6	18.7%	$4.43
Other	24	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total	**1,787**	**32**	**100%**	**$3.41**

Sides at C-Stores

PRODUCT CATEGORY	MENU INCIDENCE	OPERATORS OFFERING	OPERATOR PENETRATION	AVERAGE PRICE
Bread sides	166	30	93.7%	$1.60
Fruit	83	24	75.0%	$1.93
Other sides	68	25	78.1%	$1.79
Vegetable sides	29	16	50.0%	$1.50
Protein side	26	16	50.0%	$2.36
Other potato side	21	15	46.8%	$1.70
Fries	20	11	34.3%	$1.82
Pasta	14	3	9.3%	$4.02
Deli salads	11	5	15.6%	$1.99
Other	19	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total	**457**	**32**	**100%**	**$1.31**

Source: Technomic Ignite menu data

33%

Amount of consumers who said they would visit c-stores more often if more indulgent snacks, drinks and other foods were available

Menu Moves

The number of entrees available on c-store menus decreased more than 5% in 2019, with sandwiches and sides dropping the most, according to Technomic's MenuMonitor. This signals that retailers are simplifying menus around core signature offerings, such as Casey's General Stores' pizza or Parker's fried chicken. Although menu items decreased in c-stores last year, pork sandwiches grew 36%—more than any other foodservice item, according to Technomic. On the prepared-beverage side, iced coffee outpaced other hot and cold drinks.

Item Trends by Category

	YOY GROWTH ON C-STORE MENUS*
Entrees	(5%)
Sandwiches	(37%)
Sides	(8%)
Nonalcohol beverages	(12%)

Item Trends by Product

Pork sandwiches	36%
Iced coffee	28%
Other potato sides	24%
Fries	17%
Mexican dishes	16%
Specialty coffee	13%
Hot chocolate/cocoa	12%
Entree salads	11%
Sausage and egg sandwiches	11%
Hot dogs	10%
Mixed protein sandwiches	9%
Breads	9%

Source: Technomic Convenience Market 2019 Annual Report

Steady Decline

More consumers are purchasing c-store food less often. In a Technomic February 2019 survey, 27% said they bought a foodservice item from a c-store less often than usual, an increase of 6 percentage points from February 2018 and a 19-point increase from February 2016. In the most recent survey from November 2019, the percentage making a c-store foodservice purchase less often dipped to only 15%. However, the percentage who said they purchase c-store foodservice more often than usual also dropped, down 5 percentage points from the February 2019 survey.

C-Store Foodservice Purchases

In the past month, have you been purchasing foodservice items from convenience stores ...?

FREQUENCY	FEBRUARY 2016	FEBRUARY 2017	FEBRUARY 2018	FEBRUARY 2019	NOVEMBER 2019
More often than usual	29%	22%	23%	20%	15%
The same amount as usual	63%	64%	57%	53%	63%
Less often than usual	8%	14%	21%	27%	22%

Source: Technomic Convenience Market 2019 Annual Report

* Year-over-year growth from 2018 to 2019

High Prices Deter Customers

More than half (54%) of consumers in August 2019 said they rarely visit c-stores for foodservice items because prices are too high—more than any other reason, according to Technomic. It was followed by a lack of healthy options (31%) and not thinking of c-stores for prepared foods (31%).

Why do you rarely visit c-stores for foodservice items?

REASON	AUGUST 2015	AUGUST 2016	AUGUST 2017	AUGUST 2018	AUGUST 2019
Prices are too high	33%	33%	33%	32%	54%
Not enough healthy options	15%	15%	18%	15%	31%
I don't think of c-stores for prepared foods	41%	30%	33%	36%	31%
Poor overall value	25%	11%	15%	16%	15%
Not enough premium items	3%	4%	3%	4%	15%
Food does not look/ taste fresh	30%	17%	19%	13%	8%

Source: Technomic Convenience Market 2019 Annual Report

Healthy Habits

Only 14% of consumers said they purchase healthy foods most of the time when visiting c-stores, which is less than for supermarkets (38%), fast-casual restaurants (20%) and fast-food restaurants (18%), according to Technomic. When consumers purchase healthy foods from c-stores, they're buying fresh fruit, sandwiches and granola or protein bars most of the time.

I purchase healthy foods most of the time when visiting …

Supermarkets/grocery stores	38%
Fast-casual restaurants	20%
Fast-food restaurants	18%
Convenience stores	**14%**
Vending machines	8%

What types of healthy foods do you purchase from convenience stores?

Fresh fruit	34%
Granola/energy/protein bars	31%
Sandwiches	31%
Chips/crackers	30%
Fruit/vegetable juice	27%
Trail mix	27%
Salads	23%
Yogurt	23%
Cheese	20%
Protein items	18%
Smoothies	16%
Vegetables	15%

Source: Technomic Convenience Market 2019 Annual Report

Deals and Discounts

More than 6 in 10 consumers said receiving free items without a minimum purchase would encourage them to buy more retail foodservice items, according to Technomic. And more than half were motivated by buy one, get one half off deals, promotional discounts or free items with a purchase.

How likely are the following to encourage you to purchase retail foodservice items?

Free item without minimum purchase	62%
Buy one, get one half off	58%
Promotional discounts	53%
Free item with a purchase	53%
Coupons for a value	48%
Nonfood discounts	48%
Combo meals	46%
Coupons for a percentage discount	44%
Loyalty club discounts	42%

Source: Technomic Convenience Market 2019 Annual Report

Indulgent Options

One-third of consumers said they would visit c-stores more often if more indulgent snacks, drinks and other foods were available, according to Technomic. However, only one-fifth of consumers said they purchase indulgent foods most of the time when visiting c-stores, which ranks below fast-food restaurants (24%) and supermarkets (23%). This highlights the importance of finding the balance between indulgent and healthy options—and ensuring both are thoroughly represented.

I purchase indulgent foods most of the time when visiting …

Fast-food restaurants	24%
Supermarkets/grocery stores	23%
Fast-casual restaurants	20%
Convenience stores	**20%**
Vending machines	11%

Source: Technomic Convenience Market 2019 Annual Report

Amount of consumers who purchase healthy foods most of the time when shopping at c-stores

Dispensed Beverage Purchases

The most popular dispensed beverage purchase at c-stores is major-branded carbonated soft drinks (CSDs), according to Technomic. Hot coffee (39%) ranked second, followed by local/craft-branded CSDs and frozen slushie drinks.

More than a quarter of consumers said they purchased a major-branded CSD during their last visit to a convenience store, according to Technomic.

Which of the following dispensed foodservice beverages do you purchase?

Major-branded CSD	47%
Hot coffee	39%
Local/craft-branded CSD	28%
Frozen slushie drinks	23%
Hot specialty coffee	20%
Iced tea	18%
Sports drinks	16%
Iced coffee	15%
Energy drinks	14%
Fruit juice	14%
Lemonade	14%
Hot chocolate	13%
Water	13%

Which did you purchase for your own consumption during your last c-store visit?

Major-branded CSD	28%
Hot coffee	20%
Local/craft-branded CSD	11%
Frozen slushie drinks	11%
Hot specialty coffee	7%
Iced tea	7%
Sports drinks	6%
Fruit juice	6%
Lemonade	6%
Water	6%
Energy drinks	5%
Iced coffee	5%
Hot chocolate	*

Source: Technomic 2019 Thirsting for Innovation Report

Beverage Preferences

Seven in 10 consumers prefer to purchase dispensed beverages over made-to-order beverages in convenience stores, according to Technomic. This is likely due to the convenience, control and speed associated with these offerings. The difference varies by region: For example, 44% of Northeasterners prefer made-to-order beverages vs. 30% of consumers overall.

Source: Technomic 2019 Thirsting for Innovation Report

Dispensed Beverage Promotions

Forty-five percent of c-store consumers said they would be interested in receiving specials or promotions for dispensed beverages, according to Technomic. It ranked second only to the same for gasoline.

For which would you be interested in receiving specials or promotions?

Gas	50%
Dispensed beverages	45%
Made-to-order entrees	43%
Bottled or canned nonalcohol retail beverages	42%
Retail side/snack items	41%
Made-to-order beverages	38%
Ready-to-heat/ready-to-eat entrees	33%
Desserts	32%
Foodservice side/appetizer items	30%
Bottled or canned alcohol beverages	25%
Prepacked retail entree items	18%

Source: Technomic C-Store 2019 Annual Report

Popular Dispensed Beverage Attributes

More than three-quarters of consumers said they would like c-stores to offer healthier fountain or dispensed soda options, according to Technomic. This outpaced new and unique or functional options. More than half were interested in beverages containing cannabidiol (CBD).

Amount who agree or completely agree with each of the following statement: "I would like c-stores to offer …"

Healthier fountain or dispensed soda options	76%
New and unique foodservice beverages	74%
Foodservice beverages that offer functional benefits	70%
Foodservice beverages in bubbler dispensers	66%
A wider variety of ethnic foodservice beverages	59%
Foodservice beverages containing CBD	56%

Generational Purchasing

Baby boomers purchase dispensed beverages more often during their c-store visits than other age groups, including millennials and Generation Z, according to Technomic.

Over the past 10 times you've visited a convenience store, about how many times did you purchase a dispensed beverage?

Baby boomers	3.6
Generation X	3.0
Millennials	3.0
Generation Z	2.7

Source: Technomic 2019 Thirsting for Innovation Report

* Less than 5%

Where the Gains Are: Refrigerated and Frozen

C-store sales, 52 weeks ending Dec. 29, 2019

C-store sales of milk totaled $1.36 billion, off nearly 7% in the 52 weeks ending Dec. 29, 2019. Unit sales fell more than 8%. Both whole and skim/low-fat milk saw unit declines. Meanwhile, unit sales of ready-to-drink milk and milk substitutes—a segment that includes brands such as Nestle Nesquik and Fairlife—rose 5.7%.

Total sales of refrigerated items fell more than 1% to $4.8 billion, while sales of frozen grew more than 3% to hit nearly $2.3 billion, according to IRI. Growth areas included frozen appetizers and snack rolls, which had double-digit dollar and unit gains.

And for the second year in a row, the frozen and dry-ice segment surged. Sales grew more than 10% to reach $665.3 million in 2019.

Refrigerated Dairy

SEGMENT	C-STORE SALES ($ MILLIONS)	PCYA*	UNIT SALES (MILLIONS)	PCYA*
Whole milk	$509.2	(3.8%)	175.7	(4.7%)
Skim/low-fat milk	$467.7	(11.0%)	161.1	(12.8%)
Flavored milk/ eggnog/buttermilk	$372.3	(4.7%)	202.8	(6.7%)
RTD milk/ milk substitutes	$223.5	7.2%	105.2	5.7%
Natural cheese	$178.4	4.9%	131.1	0.4%
Yogurt	$54.0	(4.7%)	30.2	(7.0%)
Milkshakes/ nondairy drinks	$5.3	(29.6%)	2.5	(31.4%)
Almond milk	$2.7	(22.4%)	0.8	(33.7%)

Refrigerated Entrees

Handheld nonbreakfast entrees	$1,090.7	(0.1%)	313.7	(3.0%)
Breakfast entrees	$467.2	(1.5%)	181.0	(5.4%)
Meat/cheese/ cracker/dessert	$224.2	8.7%	71.8	5.4%
Dinner entrees	$9.3	(18.2%)	2.3	(19.3%)

Frozen Snacks and Entrees

Appetizers/snack rolls	$347.2	11.7%	426.8	21.9%
Handheld entrees	$171.7	(4.7%)	84.6	(4.3%)
Pizza	$159.7	2.3%	37.5	2.8%
Breakfast food	$114.6	3.4%	51.1	2.3%
Single-serve frozen dinners	$29.1	6.3%	7.1	4.7%

$665.3 million

C-store sales of frozen and dry ice in 2019, according to IRI

Frozen Dessert Trends

C-store sales, 52 weeks ending Dec. 29, 2019

C-store sales of frozen novelties and ice cream, the two largest segments in frozen desserts, were off slightly in 2019. Brands posting dollar and unit growth included f'real frozen novelties and Haagen-Dazs and private-label ice cream, according to IRI.

Frozen Novelty Brands

BRAND	C-STORE SALES ($ MILLIONS)	PCYA*	UNIT SALES (MILLIONS)	PCYA*
f'real	$109.3	2.0%	36.1	2.6%
Nestle	$59.1	(1.1%)	26.9	(3.3%)
Blue Bunny	$58.7	1.9%	26.8	(3.4%)
Nestle Drumstick	$55.8	(0.9%)	19.2	(2.0%)
Snickers	$48.6	(1.7%)	23.9	(5.5%)
Total†	**$776.7**	**(0.2%)**	**344.6**	**(2.0%)**

Ice Cream Brands

Ben & Jerry's	$169.2	0.8%	27.6	(1.6%)
Haagen-Dazs	$61.8	7.8%	11.1	5.5%
Blue Bell	$54.5	(3.6%)	16.8	(6.4%)
Private label	$37.1	7.4%	9.5	6.5%
Breyers	$26.2	(5.2%)	6.1	(9.0%)
Total†	**$519.8**	**1.2%**	**111.2**	**(1.6%)**

Refrigerated and Frozen Trends

C-store sales, 52 weeks ending Dec. 29, 2019

For the second year in a row, private-label brands led the way in refrigerated and frozen handheld entree items, according to IRI.

Refrigerated Handheld Entree Brands

BRAND	C-STORE SALES ($ MILLIONS)	PCYA*	UNIT SALES (MILLIONS)	PCYA*
Private label	$614.7	1.1%	185.1	(2.6%)
Deli Express	$168.6	1.4%	42.5	(3.5%)
Don Miguel The Bomb	$23.5	4.0%	6.7	3.2%
Pierre Big Az	$21.6	(12.3%)	5.1	(14.2%)
Don Miguel	$16.8	(2.6%)	6.5	(3.1%)
Total†	**$1,090.7**	**(0.1%)**	**313.7**	**(3.0%)**

Frozen Appetizer and Snack Roll Brands

El Monterey	$244.0	13.8%	229.8	15.3%
Don Miguel	$35.5	18.4%	166.5	35.1%
Private label	$20.8	26.3%	9.4	26.1%
Totino's Pizza Rolls	$10.9	(7.8%)	3.8	(7.8%)
Country Fresh Meats	$9.5	(7.7%)	2.3	(7.1%)
Total†	**$347.2**	**11.7%**	**426.8**	**21.9%**

Source for all charts on this page: IRI | * Percent change from a year ago | † Including UPCs/brands/families not shown