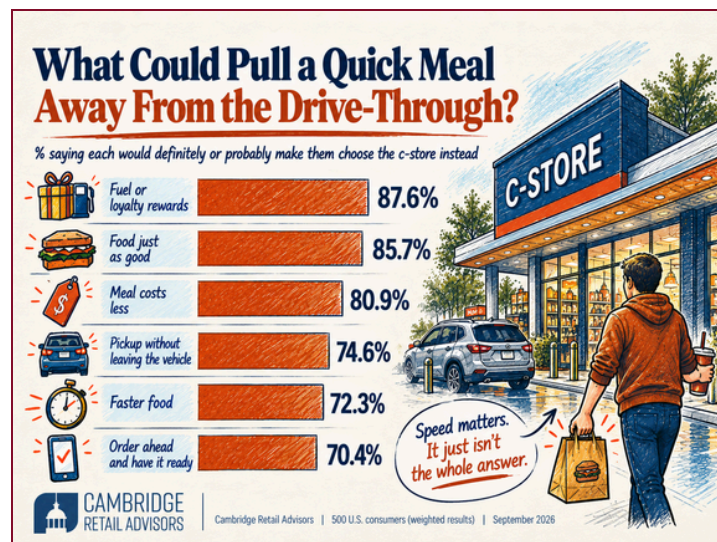



CONVENIENCE SERIES

Can a C-Store Beat the Drive-Through?

THE SHORT VERSION

Speed matters. It just isn't the whole answer. Every reason CRA tested scored above 70%, so shoppers aren't picking one feature. They're picking the whole stop.



Speed did well at 72.3%. So did everything else. Customers aren't saying speed doesn't matter. They're saying there's more involved in choosing where to get that quick meal.

— The advantage is the whole trip

A drive-through is a ten-minute stop to get one thing. A c-store visit can end with a full tank, dinner, a drink for the road, and points toward the next fill-up. That may not be fewer minutes. It's more done.

Sometimes the win isn't making one part of the trip 30 seconds faster. It's eliminating the need for another stop.



— Where the food actually gets eaten

Asked where they ate their most recent prepared c-store food purchase, 37.5% said at home, 18.4% said while driving, and 17.3% said in their vehicle at the store. Only 7.3% ate at the store itself.

Better food service doesn't automatically mean a restaurant experience. Customers want good food that fits into everything else they're doing, and they want to choose where they eat it.



— The food still has to earn the trip

Food just as good as the fast-food option was one of the strongest answers, at 85.7%. The app can't make up for the sandwich.

Loyalty, order ahead, and a pickup window only matter if the food competes.

— Three questions to ask

1

Does the food stand up to the QSR?

85.7% said food just as good would sway them.

2

Does the meal connect to rewards?

Rewards led the list at 87.6%.

3

Can customers choose how they pick up?

Window, curbside, in-store, or at the pump. Different trips, different answers.

THE TEST

If the only question is how to run the QSR playbook faster, what part of your advantage are you leaving on the table?

UP NEXT · PART 3 OF 5

If the advantage is the whole trip, why does it still feel like five transactions?

80.6% would value fuel and in-store purchases on one bill.

One Stop. One Bill. →

About Cambridge Retail Advisors

We aren't software vendors, and we aren't theoretical consultants. CRA is a specialized retail advisory firm of seasoned industry operators who have lived with the systems, led the implementations, and solved the operational friction. Strategy, system selection, and execution grounded in real retail experience. Read the full article at cambridgeretailadvisors.com. See us at NRF '27, Booth 6703.

Source: Cambridge Retail Advisors survey of 500 U.S. adults (18+) who shop at convenience stores, weighted results, September 2026.