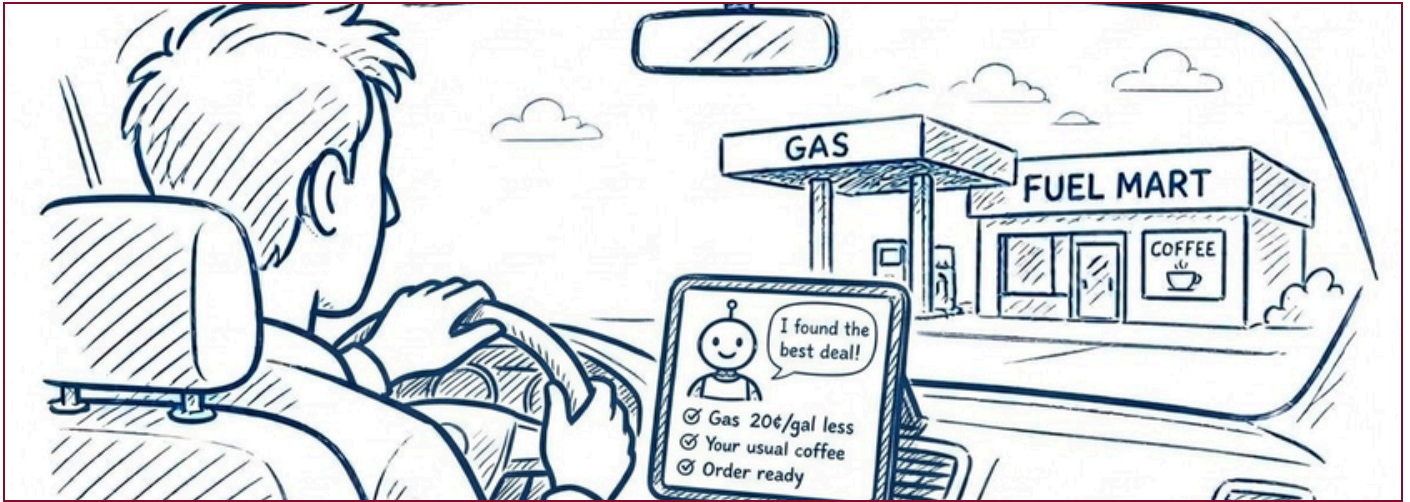
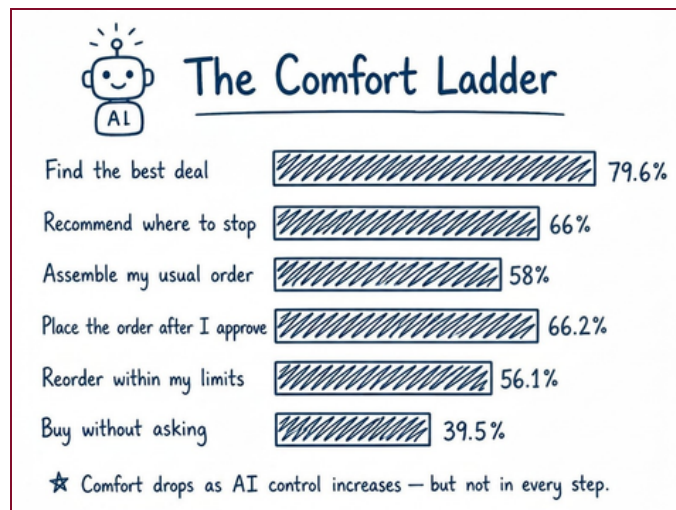



CONVENIENCE SERIES

How Much Will Customers Let AI Do for Them?

THE SHORT VERSION

Customers are comfortable getting help with their decisions, but considerably less comfortable giving up control over the final purchase.



Asked about making a purchase without checking with the customer again, comfort dropped to 39.5%. And 44.3% were very uncomfortable with that level of independence.

— Start by building trust with the easy stuff

79.6% are comfortable letting AI find the best available deal, and 66% are comfortable letting it recommend where to stop based on route, fuel price, food and rewards. That matters. NACS Research reported in-store transactions down 4.5% in the first half of 2026, with customers increasingly stopping for fuel without considering going inside. If an AI assistant cannot see what makes your location worth visiting, you risk being left out of the recommendation entirely.

— Ordering with customer control

66.2% are comfortable letting AI place an order after they approve it. 58% would let it assemble an order from things they regularly buy, for review first. 56.1% would allow it to reorder familiar items within limits they've already established.

Casey's uses AI phone ordering at about 2,600 stores, and DoorDash lets customers text "order my usual."

— Giving AI more control takes trust

50.8% want to approve every purchase. 38.5% want an easy way to cancel or correct an order, 29.5% want spending limits and 29.1% want an immediate notification. And 20.7% wouldn't allow AI to make purchases for them at all.

These controls aren't barriers to adopting AI. They help customers feel comfortable using it.



— Don't overlook the operational side

A personalized food recommendation doesn't mean much if the item isn't available. An AI-assisted order creates frustration if the kitchen never receives it or the customer arrives before it's ready. The technology may change how customers order, but the store still has to deliver.

— What I'd do with this

1

Make stores easy to discover and compare.

Accurate fuel prices, food offerings, promotions and loyalty benefits.

2

Keep ordering simple.

Show what's in the order, what they'll pay and how to make changes.

3

Let customers set the limits.

Purchasing limits, and when they want to approve.

THE TAKEAWAY

The first thing customers hand over won't be the wallet. It will be the research.

UP NEXT • BONUS, IN THE FULL SERIES PDF

AI may make the research easy. Loyalty still has to give customers a reason to stop.

9.4%

named a reward as the main reason for their last stop, even though 67% use a c-store or gas station app.

Everyone Has the App. So Why Doesn't It Drive the Visit? →

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. NACS Research via C-Store Dive, October 2026.