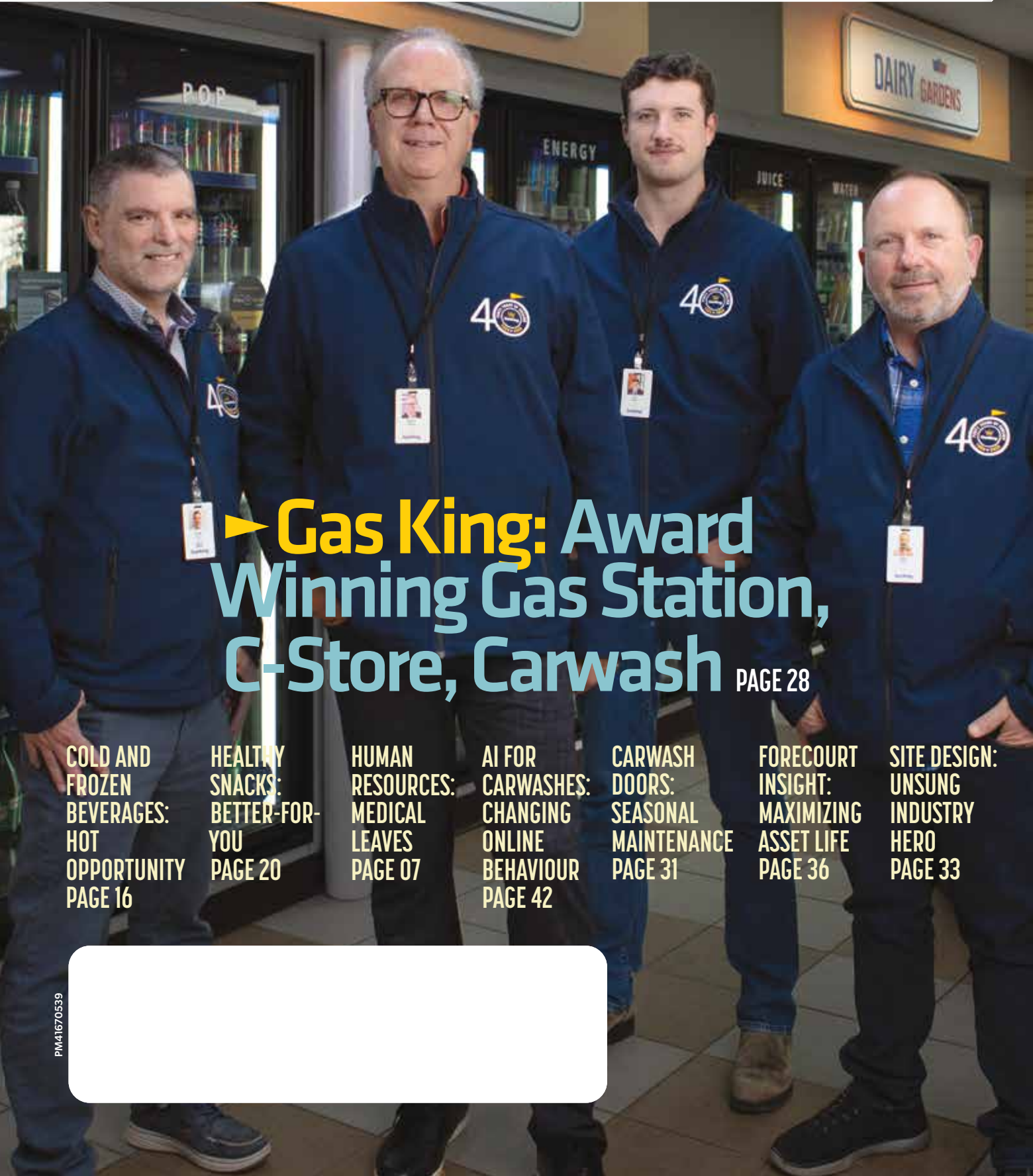


Convenience & Carwash

MAY/JUNE 2026

 **CANADA**



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UPCOMING EVENTS

June 11, 2026
CCA Spring Networking Event
5:30 pm–7:30 pm
www.canadiancarwash.ca
October 5–7, 2026

Northeast Regional Carwash Convention
Atlantic City, NJ
www.nrccshow.com

October 6–9, 2026
NACS Show
Las Vegas, NV
www.nacsshow.com

October 6–9, 2026
PEI Convention at the NACS Show
Las Vegas, NV
www.pei.org/convention/

January 19–21, 2027
13th Women in Carwash Conference
B Ocean Resort,
Fort Lauderdale, FL
www.womenincarwash.com

February 16–18, 2027
WPMA Expo
MGM Grand,
Las Vegas, NV
www.wpmaexpo.com

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Thank you for 18 Years

Well, summer is almost upon us, although at the time of writing this message, Winnipeg is expecting a high of 23 °C today, with a snowstorm, freezing rain, and sleet in the forecast for tonight.

With thoughts of golf season and summertime, we bring to you articles about healthy snacks, propane programs, and ice cream, along with other seasonal thought-provoking editorials that include carwash site design, cold and frozen beverages and equipment, and so much more. A jam-packed edition to ensure you and your team have what you need to jump into the season with everything to keep your team educated and busy as the warm summer days move in.

This edition is the final issue of our 18 years of publishing that has had me visiting the previous 107 publications that span a lifetime of changes, from the introduction of ATMs within the store, to digital displays on petroleum dispensers, from tobacco sales to hidden tobacco behind shower curtains, to energy drinks, calming drinks, and so much more.

Our cover story features GasKing of Lethbridge as Brent Morris shares the excitement of their newly claimed awards. Congratulations to Brent, Scott Sibbet, and the whole team. Well done!

I invite you to sit on the deck, grab a cold or frozen beverage, and take some time to read through and enjoy this edition.

As always, your success is my business, and as always, my open-door policy to your valuable feedback remains not only intact but stronger than ever. If you have an editorial topic that you want us to cover, or perhaps you would like to be featured in an upcoming edition, we'd love to hear from you.

Brenda Jane Johnstone PUBLISHER

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Canadians Like Neighbourhood Businesses

A recent report from the technology company Square states that a small but loyal group of repeat customers generates nearly six times more annual revenue than one-time visitors for Canadian neighbourhood businesses.

The *Square Local Economy Report* makes me think of the many times I have heard people comment on the friendliness of their neighbourhood convenience stores. People have told me about how they mentioned to a convenience store clerk that they would like to see a certain item for sale at the store and discovered that item on the shelf on their next visit. Others have told me that their local convenience store owner says hello to them by name when they enter the store. I have also been told by parents that they shop at the convenience store by their homes because their children go to school with the children of the owners and they want to support the family.

I think this is part of the "neighbourhood effect" that the Square report talks about.

According to the report, while many Canadians anticipate tightening household budgets in 2026, local loyalty remains strong. Here are some statistics from the report:

- Eighty-one per cent of Canadians plan to shop in their local neighbourhoods as much or more than last year.
- Sixty-one per cent would continue supporting local businesses even if prices increase, provided value improves.
- Seventy-four per cent visit multiple local businesses in a single trip at least occasionally.

Proximity to home now ranks as the top driver of local spending decisions, ahead of price alone, followed by word-of-mouth recommendations and perceived value, according to the report. This bodes well for neighbourhood convenience stores.

If convenience store owners and staff keep offering friendly service and listen to what their customers are saying, this summer could be one of repeat business from happy shoppers, which means a successful season. Happy summer everyone!

Angela Altass
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AWARDS





After more 17 years and over 100 issues, this edition marks my final time designing *Convenience & Carwash Canada* magazine.

Over that time, I've had the privilege of working with a dedicated and evolving team of editors, writers, and contributors. While individuals have come and gone, the consistency, professionalism, and commitment to quality have always remained through Brenda's vision. That kind of foundation makes all the difference, and it's something I've never taken for granted.

I'm especially grateful for the trust that was placed in me to help shape the visual identity of the magazine over the years. Good design is never created in isolation, it's the result of strong content, clear direction, and a shared commitment to producing something of value for readers. Together, we were able to refine and elevate the publication in ways that connected both editorially and visually with its audience.

It's also been rewarding to see that work recognized through national design and editorial awards, achievements that reflect the strength of the entire team behind each issue.

To the readers, thank you for your continued support of the magazine. It has always been my goal to present content in a way that is not only informative, but visually engaging and accessible.

As the publication moves forward, I'm confident it will continue to evolve and serve the industry well.

Thank you again to everyone I've had the opportunity to work with over the years – it's been a genuinely rewarding experience.

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MANEUVERING NEW AND EXPANDED LONG-TERM MEDICAL ILLNESS LEAVES

BY RENEE BOYDA

ACROSS THE PROVINCES, LONG-TERM MEDICAL ILLNESS LEAVES NOW TYPICALLY LAST UP TO 27 WEEKS, ALIGNING WITH FEDERAL EI SICKNESS BENEFITS.

Across the provinces, long-term medical illness leave regulations are changing. Several provinces have expanded or introduced job-protected leaves for employees facing serious medical conditions. The titles of these leaves may vary by province, but overall these updates mean longer absences from work for employees to recover from illness without the fear of job loss. For employers these changes require careful handling and planning to manage operational continuity, compliance and reintegration.

Across the provinces, long-term medical illness leaves now typically last up to 27 weeks, aligning with federal EI sickness benefits. Ontario introduced its long-term illness leave in June 2025, while British Columbia enacted a similar leave in late

2025. Manitoba expanded its leave in 2024, while Saskatchewan aligned to 27 weeks and Alberta expanded its leave to the same duration from 16 weeks, both as of January 1, 2026. The alignment streamlines access to income support for employees and enhances job protection. However, eligibility thresholds and the requirement for medical documentation vary by province. For example, the eligibility thresholds range from 13 weeks of service in Ontario to 90 days in Alberta.

Employers have several obligations in relation to long-term medical illness leaves. They must grant eligible employees the full duration of the leave as mandated by their specific province. For verification purposes, employers typically require medical documentation from qualified practitioners. Medical documentation should only be requested when reasonable and is limited to what is necessary for eligibility and

>>

accommodation assessment. The long-term medical illness leave is not paid for by the employer, unless the employer has a policy in place or the employment contract states otherwise. Because this leave is protected, the employer must protect the employee's job and accrue service or seniority as per legislation. An employer cannot retaliate against the employee for taking the leave – including discipline, termination of employment or performing any action that would cause a disadvantage to the employee as a result of that employee taking a protected leave. Employers are also obligated to return the employee to their pre-leave role or a comparable one with equivalent pay, benefits and status upon completion of the leave or when medically cleared to return.

Alongside the leave, employers have a duty to engage in the accommodation process under human rights laws. In a nutshell the accommodation process includes requesting just enough medical documentation to verify functional abilities and to understand the employee's restrictions. Collaboratively, the employer and employee would then work together to explore possible accommodation. During the leave, the employer must initiate return-to-work planning, which is also part of the accommodation process. The return-to-work plan requires ongoing communication with the employee and, based on their medical restrictions might include modified duties or graduated hours, to ensure a safe return to work. Failure to meet all of these obligations can open the employer up to complaints under employment standards or human rights. Hence the need for employers to ensure a consistent and well documented handling of each case.


Employees have obligations as well. They must meet the leave eligibility requirements of their province and provide medical documentation from a qualified health practitioner confirming that they have a serious medical condition, along with the amount of time they will need to be absent from work. Employees must also be cooperative and collaborative with both the accommodation and return-to-work processes.

Employers should not wait until they have an employee that requires a long-term illness leave to prepare. Being familiar with their jurisdiction's specific leave entitlements, duration, eligibility criteria and reinstatement



requirements is important to ensure compliance with provincial employment standards. Employers should also review and update their leave policies, train managers, ensure accurate tracking of leaves, and keep medical information confidential and limited to the minimum amount of information required. Long absences have a far bigger operational impact on small employers, so cross training staff and creating work coverage plans are highly important.

For small employers, having to manage longer statutory leaves is a challenge. The challenge is not just compliance but keeping operations running smoothly. While the rules differ by province, the core issues are the same: Knowledge of when to apply the leave, requesting the right medical documentation, protecting the employee's job, planning for coverage, accommodation and return-to-work duties.

If you require assistance with leave management, accommodation or return-to-work processes, or any other HR related matter, please contact us at TIPI Legacy HR+. 

Renee Boyda is a human resources consultant with Legacy Bowes. She is a CPHR candidate, received her Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from the University of Manitoba, and received both Human Resource Management and Management Development Certificates with Honours from Red River College. She is focused on building HR structures and processes to create consistency and fairness in workplaces across Canada. Renee is a proud Metis, with over 12 years of human resource experience in both union and non-union environments. She can be reached at (204) 947-5525.

MEDICAL DOCUMENTATION SHOULD ONLY BE REQUESTED WHEN REASONABLE AND IS LIMITED TO WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND ACCOMMODATION ASSESSMENT.



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THE SWEETEST SCOOP IN CANADIAN CONVENIENCE

When Canadians reach for a treat, there's one name that keeps rising to the top. Chapman's Ice Cream has been voted Canada's Most Valued Brand for the second consecutive year – a remarkable back-to-back achievement that represents love, loyalty and trust.

A Convenience Program Built for Your Business

Chapman's is actively expanding its dedicated convenience program across Canada, bringing a full range of real ice cream products to convenience and gas (C&G) retailers coast to coast. Their grab-and-go variety includes cones, sandwiches, bars, and water ice lolly treats, all of which drive freezer traffic and repeat visits. Every product is made with 100 per cent Canadian dairy, crafted from premium ingredients with natural flavours and colours. No artificial shortcuts.

Chapman's is also expanding the availability of its 500 mL Super Premium Plus ice cream tubs, available in 14 flavours, into the convenience channel. These premium tubs retail tax-free and offer customers a quality take-home option beyond the single-serve impulse purchase.

To help drive awareness from the road, Chapman's offers the largest variety of supporting point-of-sale materials in the category, from window clings and in-store displays to outdoor signage. These hard-to-miss

marketing materials are sure to grab your customers' attention.

Investing in Canada's Ice Cream Future

The family-owned, Markdale, Ontario-based company recently announced a \$200 million facility expansion, supported by a \$27 million loan through the Invest Ontario Fund. The new 175,000-square-foot production facility will be their third, adding 200 jobs and boosting production capacity by 35 per cent. New product lines, enhanced allergy-friendly offerings, and even more Canadian-sourced ingredients are all on the horizon, with the facility expected to open this year.

As Chapman's Chief Operating Officer Ashley Chapman put it: "This expansion comes at a critical time for Chapman's. The competition from multinationals has only increased in recent years, and this project will help us to establish a stronger competitive ground."

For C&G retailers, that means a strong domestic partner with the capacity to grow alongside your business. And with more Canadian consumers increasingly mindful of where their dollars go, stocking Chapman's as a homegrown brand tells customers you carry brands they care about.

Contact your Chapman's sales representative to learn how to bring the convenience program to your location. **C**

CHAPMAN'S IS A TRAFFIC DRIVER, A CONVERSION TOOL, AND A BRAND THAT REDEFINES INDULGENCE WITH AFFORDABLE LUXURY.





WORK SMARTER, NOT HARDER: STREAMLINING CONVENIENCE STORE INVENTORY WITH REAL-TIME TRACKING

BY ELIE Y. KATZ

Running a convenience store means making hundreds of small decisions every day—and few matter more than knowing what's on your shelves and what needs restocking. Inventory management is the process of controlling the flow of products into and out of your business, and getting it right can mean the difference between a thriving store and one that's constantly playing catch-up.

Too many store owners still rely on clipboards, handwritten counts, and spreadsheets to track their stock. It works, technically—but it's the hard way. Manual methods eat up hours, invite human error, and leave you guessing when you should know. A smarter approach exists; real-time inventory management systems that maximize efficiency, minimize costs, and keep your shelves stocked with exactly what your customers want.

The Hidden Costs of Doing It the Hard Way

Poor inventory management doesn't just create headaches. It quietly drains your profitability in ways that are easy to overlook until the damage is done.

Stockouts and lost sales are the most visible problems. When a customer walks in looking for their go-to energy drink or a pack of cigarettes and finds an empty shelf, you've lost more than one sale. You've frustrated a

loyal customer, damaged your store's reputation, and possibly sent them straight to a competitor down the street. Convenience stores live and die by reliability. If shoppers can't count on finding what they need, they'll stop coming.

Overstock creates its own set of problems. Excess inventory takes up valuable shelf and backroom space, and perishable goods don't wait around. Chips go stale, dairy expires, and seasonal items lose their appeal. Every product that gets tossed or marked down for clearance represents money lost—money you spent on goods that never generated a return.

Then there's the capital problem. Cash tied up in slow-moving inventory is cash you can't use elsewhere. You might need funds to upgrade equipment, expand your product mix, or invest in marketing. When your money sits on shelves collecting dust, your business loses flexibility and growth potential.

Real-Time Visibility Changes Everything

Modern inventory management software takes the guesswork out of stocking decisions. Instead of relying on memory, gut instinct, or end-of-week counts, you get instant access to accurate data about what's selling, what's sitting, and what needs reordering.

Real-time tracking prevents both overstocking and

OPTIMIZING YOUR INVENTORY ISN'T ABOUT COUNTING BOXES MORE CAREFULLY. IT'S ABOUT MAKING DATA-INFORMED DECISIONS THAT DIRECTLY BOOST YOUR BOTTOM LINE.

stockouts. You can see exactly how many units of each product remain at any moment, which means you're never caught off guard by an empty shelf or surprised by a backroom full of merchandise that won't move.

The financial benefits compound quickly. Optimized stock levels reduce storage costs and improve inventory turnover—the rate at which you sell and replace products. Faster turnover means less capital locked up in goods and more cash available for other business needs.

Your customers notice the difference, too. Consistent product availability builds trust. When shoppers know they can rely on your store to have what they need, they come back. Loyalty follows reliability, and loyal customers are the foundation of long-term profitability.

Features That Make the Difference

Not all inventory systems offer the same capabilities. For convenience stores, certain features deliver outsized value.

Automated reordering eliminates the need to manually monitor every product. You set minimum stock thresholds, and when inventory drops below that level, the system automatically generates a purchase order. No more forgetting to reorder a bestseller until it's already sold out.

Pricebook management keeps your pricing organized and consistent. A centralized pricebook lets you track product performance, adjust prices efficiently, and ensure every item rings up correctly at checkout. Pricing errors frustrate customers and cost you money—a good pricebook prevents both.

Vendor management integration streamlines your relationship with suppliers. Centralizing vendor data makes it easier to place orders, track deliveries, and communicate about stock issues. When receiving shipments becomes faster and more accurate, your whole operation runs smoother.

Data analysis and insights turn raw sales numbers into actionable intelligence. Understanding sales trends and demand patterns helps you plan ahead—ordering more of what's about to be in demand and cutting back on what isn't moving.

How NRS POS Brings It All Together

National Retail Solutions built its POS system specifically for small businesses like yours. NRS provides an easy-to-use, flexible platform that handles real-time inventory tracking, automated reordering, and data analytics in one integrated package.

The system handles the heavy lifting so you can spend less time on back-office tasks and more time where it matters—serving customers and growing your business. Cloud-based options let you monitor your store remotely, so you're never out of the loop even when you're not on-site. And with affordable pricing and reliable multi-language customer support, NRS removes the barriers that keep small retailers from accessing enterprise-level tools.

The Bottom Line

Optimizing your inventory isn't about counting boxes more carefully. It's about making data-informed decisions that directly boost your bottom line. Every stockout prevented, every overstock avoided, and every hour saved on manual tracking adds up to real money in your pocket. Stop working harder. Start working smarter. **■**

Elie Y. Katz is the president and CEO of National Retail Solutions (NRS), which operates thousands of point-of-sale terminals across the United States and Canada, offering NRS Pay credit card processing and business cash advance funding to small and mid-sized independent retailers.

For more information, visit nrsplus.com or call (888) 541-1073.

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THE EXECUTION GAP IN RETAIL PRICING – AND HOW ELECTRONIC SHELF LABELS ARE CLOSING IT

Illustrative microchip used in electronic shelf labels



Examples of electronic shelf labels in various display sizes, with screens capable of showing shades of six primary colours (black, white, red, yellow, orange, and grey).

Retail pricing has become much harder to manage in recent years. Tariffs, geopolitical tensions, currency swings, and supply chain disruptions create constant pressure on product costs across almost every category.

BY LAING HENSHALL

When oil and gas prices move, freight and packaging costs follow, and those changes flow through to the price of almost everything on the shelf. Suppliers are also running promotions more frequently, adding another layer of time-sensitive pricing events that stores need to execute. For retailers managing tens of thousands of products, this means price changes that once happened occasionally now happen weekly or even daily.

This is not a new trend. During COVID, supply chain disruptions caused rapid shifts in supplier costs and product availability, and that pressure has never fully eased. There is little reason to expect it will anytime soon.

This shift has highlighted an operational constraint inside physical stores. Retailers can update prices instantly in pricing and merchandising systems, but the shelf itself still relies on paper labels that must be replaced manually. Each price change requires staff to print labels, walk the store, and replace tags one by one.

As the pace of price changes increases, this process becomes difficult to sustain. It is expensive, introduces errors, and often creates temporary mismatches between shelf prices and point-of-sale systems.

ESLS REPLACE PAPER PRICE LABELS WITH SMALL DIGITAL DISPLAYS MOUNTED ON THE SHELF EDGE.

Retail has been increasingly turning to Electronic Shelf Labels (ESLs) to address this execution gap.


ESLs replace paper price labels with small digital displays mounted on the shelf edge. Modern ESL platforms integrate with POS systems, ERP platforms, inventory management tools, and pricing engines, allowing price updates to flow directly from central systems to store shelves. When a price is updated in the central system, the shelf tag updates automatically within seconds.

The scale of the problem is reflected in how quickly the investment pays off. Operators have reported getting their ESL investment back within 12 months. The returns come from multiple directions including savings from paper and printing, fewer pricing errors, better promotional compliance, enhanced picking and stocking using LED flash features, and improvements in the shopping experience.

The importance of ESLs is set to climb even further. Many retailers are now looking at analytics and artificial intelligence to support pricing decisions. AI-driven pricing systems can identify and execute optimal price adjustments across thousands of products faster than any manual process could support.

However, AI-driven pricing only works if the store environment can execute those decisions quickly and reliably. Without automation at the shelf, paper labels create a bottleneck between digital pricing decisions and the physical store.

ESLs remove that bottleneck by allowing prices to update instantly at the shelf, ESLs enable retailers to fully implement data-driven and AI-assisted pricing strategies across entire store networks.

Retailers are under more pricing pressure than ever. ESLs have quietly emerged as a solution to the gap between pricing decision and the shelf, which is why adoption is accelerating across every retail format. 

WITHOUT AUTOMATION AT THE SHELF, PAPER LABELS CREATE A BOTTLENECK BETWEEN DIGITAL PRICING DECISIONS AND THE PHYSICAL STORE.



Electronic shelf labels in a frozen foods section, displaying pricing on refrigerated products.



Electronic shelf labels across a beef jerky and packaged snack section, displaying product pricing and information.

Laing Henshall is an operating executive and lawyer with deep experience scaling retail technology businesses. He currently serves as president of Smart Label Solutions, where he leads ESL program deployments for major retailers across North America. Under his leadership, Smart Label Solutions has grown more than 10x over the past two years, expanding from a Canadian provider to a full-service ESL solutions company with offices across North America.

Prior to this, Laing spent over a decade in private equity as an operating partner across retail, ecommerce, and tech-enabled business services, holding CEO, COO, and General Counsel positions within portfolio companies.

Laing holds an MBA from London Business School, a JD from the University of Calgary, and a BA from Western University, and is called to the Bar of British Columbia.



Electronic shelf labels on shelves with packaged grocery items, including, snacks, pantry goods, and canned products.



COLD AND FROZEN BEVERAGES: COOL EQUIPMENT, HOT OPPORTUNITY

BY MELINE BEACH

The cold and frozen beverage category has moved well beyond a seasonal novelty to a year-round necessity for convenience and gas (C&G) retailers. From simple to sophisticated, today's equipment and product offerings span the full spectrum – frozen carbonated beverages (FCB), frozen uncarbonated beverages (FUB) slush, smoothie stations, automated espresso and iced coffee systems, nitro cold brew on tap, soft serve, and sparkling water dispensers – to name a few. The right program can drive traffic, spark impulse sales, lift margins and help a c-store stand out in a crowded market.

Margins regularly average 65 to 80 per cent with iced coffee growing by double digits year over year, as consumers of every age reach for a frozen drink. For C&G retailers ready to explore the category or upgrade their current program, understanding the equipment landscape is a natural place to start.

Equipment Options

Western Refrigeration has been supplying the C&G channel for more than 35 years. What began as a focus on refrigeration, walk-in boxes and self-contained units, has grown into a full range of food service solutions, including FCB, FUB, milkshake and smoothie machines, fountain soda and iced coffee.

According to Chris Midbo, head of sales, marketing and new business development, a dispensed beverage program is a standalone offering that doesn't require a food service program to succeed, especially FCB.

"Frozen carbonated beverages is one of the highest in-demand products for the consumer and the number one profit generator for a c-store," says Midbo.

A basic FUB slush program starts at under \$4,000, while an FCB

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unit runs under \$20,000, with countertop and floor models available in low, medium and high capacity, ranging from two to four barrels. "We can match a program to the site needs and budget," he adds. Western Refrigeration handles delivery, uncrating, placement, installation and training across Canada. A national toll-free line covers both warranty and post-warranty support.

TFI Canada has been partnering with top chains and independent operators in the C&G channel for more than 40 years, becoming a trusted resource for equipment, industry knowledge and service networks. Franke is a more recent addition to the C&G channel, with about 10 years in the space, and TFI's

full-program support, including installation, training, service, OEM parts and long-term operational guidance.

DSL's cold and frozen beverage portfolio for the C&G channel is led by Taylor, Franke and Flavor Burst add-on systems. Taylor equipment supports slush, frozen coffee, smoothies and soft serve, while Franke systems support premium iced coffee and specialty beverage programs. Franke's modular design allows retailers to add an additional powder hopper, for a beverage like matcha, without bringing in a whole new machine. Flavor Burst add-on systems deliver up to eight additional flavours to an existing barrel without increasing store footprint.



representation of the brand has helped bolster operator confidence.

According to Judi Saliba, senior sales executive at TFI Canada, the Taylor Model 349C FCB (slush) has the broadest penetration across Canada of any frozen carbonated beverage machine, and a typical operational lifespan of 15 years, making this investment a sound long-term business decision. The Franke A800 and A1000 are best utilized for iced coffee.

"FCB offers the highest margin of any category in a c-store," says Saliba. "Consumers don't age out of the product offering, assuring generational consumption."

For independent operators, TFI's team helps retailers determine the most profitable solution for the store while their service teams handle installation, startup and training.

DSL Ltd. has been serving the Western Canadian market since 1916, with convenience retail an important part of that journey for close to 60 years. Their role has evolved from equipment supply to

"These are proven platforms for the channel, but they are also flexible and easy to use for promotions, limited-time offers and trend-driven beverage launches," says Breanne Bannerholt, marketing manager at DSL.

The biggest trend DSL is tracking right now is the shift toward cold and iced specialty coffee. Many of their Franke customers are now pairing a countertop ice machine directly beside an automated espresso machine, so customers can build their own iced coffee.

Specialty Beverage (SB) Solutions has been serving the C&G channel for more than 20 years, with product lines that have evolved from drinkable soup, oatmeal and slush mixes in the early days, to the elevated product offerings including granita, real smoothies, nitro coffee and sparkling water drinks.

SB Solutions offers countertop Elmeco slush machines, made in Italy and recognized for producing some of the best slush available, along with Blendtec commercial blend-in-cup blenders, WatNitro for nitro >>



“THINK OF IT LIKE AN OIL CHANGE FOR YOUR CAR,” SAYS MIDBO. “BY FOLLOWING THE MANUFACTURER’S RECOMMENDED SCHEDULE, YOU EXTEND THE LIFE OF THE UNIT AND MINIMIZE DOWNTIME.”

cold brew on tap and WatWater for sparkling, flat and room temperature water dispensing.

“We are now offering elevated products that increase product quality and have amazing margins,” says Daren Schwengler, president of Specialty Beverage Solutions.

The Blendtec system is unique as it blends directly in the cup the customer takes with them and is well suited for full-service locations. WatNitro pumps nitrogen into coffee automatically, with no gas tanks required. New equipment across the category is also becoming more environmentally friendly, and consumers are seeking higher quality flavours and textures. Schwengler sees these trends as a real opportunity for c-store retailers. “Beverage is always key,” he says. “With or without food, a quality iced drink, made fast, will bring in customers.”

Site Assessment, Support and Maintenance

Choosing the equipment is only part of the decision. How you acquire it, where you put it, and how you support it operationally are what separate a program that performs well

from one that is “out of order” often.

Each supplier stated they start with the store, not the machine, with a focus on location, customer demographics and competition in order to help identify the right equipment.

“We believe in understanding the current challenges and vision of our customers before presenting solutions,” says Bannerholt. “We help retailers build a program that is practical, scalable and suited to their operation, that will position them uniquely in the market and make them a destination.”

SB Solutions focuses on teaching the features and benefits of equipment alongside menu development, working with their own products as well as those from other suppliers. Additional key considerations include labour, staffing, cleaning expectations, counter space, store size and power requirements.

Midbo adds, “Don’t overlook the practical details. When you add a dispensed beverage program, you also need cups, lids and straws, and a place for those.”

On the maintenance side, the message from all suppliers is consistent: Don’t

underestimate it, but don’t be intimidated either. Coffee equipment requires daily cleaning, while FCB equipment typically needs attention just a few times per year.

“Think of it like an oil change for your car,” says Midbo. “By following the manufacturer’s recommended schedule, you extend the life of the unit and minimize downtime.”

DSL’s after-sales support team includes over 70 factory-trained technicians carrying OEM parts on their trucks, no third-party service agents. “Uptime is critical because if the equipment is not running, it is not making money,” says Bannerholt.

TFI’s service network covers installation, startup, reactive repairs and customized preventive maintenance programs across Canada. Well-maintained equipment can last 15 to 20 years or more.

As for ROI, margins for FCB, slush and iced coffee sit at approximately 80 per cent, with equipment costs recoverable in as little as a year and a half from launch. A well-executed beverage program includes marketing, in-store or through social media. Retailers are also encouraged to observe what market

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leaders are doing and what the competition may be offering in the area – in order to compete at the best level possible. The best returns come when the program is simple, well merchandised, consistently available and easy for staff to maintain.

Buying, Leasing and Financing

Choosing how to acquire equipment is also important. Leasing is an increasingly popular option for independents, allowing operators to get into a program with limited money down. Because margins are strong, equipment can pay itself off relatively quickly.

Western Refrigeration offers leasing options designed to match the program to the operator's budget, with margins strong enough that equipment commonly pays off in six to nine months depending on location and demographics. TFI offers equipment for purchase or through a third-party leasing company. SB Solutions works with DS Leasing on lease-to-own structures, where operators calculate the number of drinks per day needed to cover the payment. "There is only a small buyout at the end of the lease

and the operator owns the equipment," says Schwengler. Increasingly, retailers are also requesting quotes that include service and maintenance, a trend Schwengler sees as an encouraging sign for the long-term health of programs in the channel. Investment levels vary widely depending on store profile, volume and location type, ranging from as low as \$1,500 up to \$50,000, with options available for every size of operation.

A Retailer's Point of View

Sometimes the most grounded perspective on a category comes from someone who is new to it. Janna Erichsen, owner of Ms J's Convenience, purchased her c-store less than six months ago and considered a slush machine a non-negotiable from the start. She kept the machine from the previous owner used – a three-flavour self-serve Slush Puppy Canada unit rented seasonally for about \$800 for the season including product. Space requirements are roughly three by four feet. The supplier handles cleaning at end of season. Staff involvement is minimal.

"High margins. Yes, worth the investment,"

she says. Blue raspberry is the top seller. Erichsen rotates flavours through the season, and while she's still building a full picture of ROI in her first year of operation, the category was a must-have in her view.

Her experience is a practical reminder that a cold beverage program doesn't need to be complicated to be effective. A small footprint, a reliable supplier relationship, a self-serve format and a handful of well-chosen flavours can be enough to get started and enough to keep customers coming back.

The cold and frozen beverage equipment is better than it has ever been, the margins are real, and the consumer appetite for these beverages is only growing. **■**

Meline Beach is a Toronto-based communications practitioner and frequent contributor to Convenience and Carwash Canada. In addition to freelance writing, Meline provides communications and public relations support to businesses across Canada. She can be reached at www.mlbcomms.ca.

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SNACKS WITH BENEFITS

BY ANGELA ALTASS

Whether it is referred to as healthier-for-you or better-for-you, Canadian consumers have shown a growing interest in snack products with benefits.

“There’s no shortage of research highlighting the continued momentum behind better-for-you snacking in Canada,” says Diana Ly, marketing director, Quaker. “Studies point to growing consumer interest in more intentional, balanced snack choices, with segments like puffed snacks continuing to resonate.”

Today’s Canadian snacker appears to be looking for balance, with taste continuing to drive decisions and overall satisfaction, says Ly.

“Convenience is non-negotiable, especially as more Canadians replace missed meals with snacks,” she says. “Nearly half of Gen Z Canadians say they often skip meals because they’re short on time, and more than a third of Canadians snack regularly between meals.”

A few clear themes are shaping the snack category in Canada right now, says Ly.

“The first is ingredient transparency with consumers reading labels more carefully and gravitating toward products with simpler, recognizable ingredients,” notes Ly. “The second is the rise of permissible

indulgence. Shoppers want snacks that feel like a treat without compromising their lifestyle goals. Flavour innovation is also accelerating, with bolder and more indulgent profiles emerging across the better-for-you segment. And, underlying all of it is convenience, particularly among younger Canadians who are navigating time-constrained schedules.”

Crispy Minis brown rice cakes are Quaker’s on-the-go answer for the c-store channel, says Ly.

“What’s especially interesting is that taste and balance are no longer viewed as opposing ideas,” says Ly. “Consumers appear to gravitate toward products that bring flavour and satisfaction while fitting into their everyday choices, and that’s where Crispy Minis land. Whole-grain ingredients paired with a range of flavours is a combination that checks a lot of boxes for today’s snacker.”

Ly advises convenience retailers not to treat better-for-you snacks as an afterthought.



BARs WITH FUNCTIONAL BENEFITS ARE SEEING AN UPTICK IN THE MARKET TODAY, INCLUDING HIGH PROTEIN AND FIBRE, CLEAN INGREDIENTS, AND CONSIDERATION OF ALLERGENS.

“The average c-store visit lasts about three minutes, and a significant portion of shoppers don’t venture far from high-traffic areas, so placement is everything,” she states. “End cap and perimeter positioning, combined with checkout adjacency, is essential. Pairing snacks with beverages in combo or value formats is proving effective at building basket size while reinforcing affordability for shoppers.”

There is continued momentum in snacks that balance health with indulgence, says Patrick Higgins, president, Propel Natural Brands.

“The biggest shift we’re seeing is that healthy is no longer a niche,” says Higgins. “It’s becoming the baseline expectation. The brands that succeed are the ones that deliver mainstream appeal first and health as a built-in benefit, not the headline. At Propel Natural Brands, we have a strong focus on better-for-you products in familiar formats. Think potato chips but made with cleaner ingredients and better oils. The goal is to meet consumers where they are, without asking them to compromise on taste.”

Industry data consistently shows that better-for-you snacks are outpacing conventional snacks in growth, particularly in channels where shoppers are becoming more intentional about their choices, says Higgins.

“Taste remains the number one driver,” he says. “Beyond that, consumers are looking for clean labels and fewer ingredients, transparency and trust in brands, balanced nutrition that is not overly restrictive, and familiar formats with a healthier twist.”

Healthier snacks perform better when merchandised alongside conventional options rather than in a separate section, adds Higgins.

“Keep it simple,” he advises. “Highlight a few strong SKUs with clear signage rather than overwhelming the consumer with too many niche products.”

As of January 1, 2026, front-of-package nutrition symbols are required on foods that are high in one or more of saturated fat, sugars, or sodium. Higgins notes that this new legislation puts pressure on brands to simplify formulations and reduce negative nutrients, which will ultimately benefit the better-for-you segment.

“I’m all for anything increasing transparency and helping consumers make faster decisions,” says Higgins. “We will see how the front-of-package nutrition symbols impact decision making longer term, but my

thinking is that, in most cases, people are aware when the product they are purchasing is high in sodium, sugar, or saturated fat. I think products that are considered non-indulgent may see a negative impact as consumers may not want to waste sugar calories on something like ketchup or granola bars.”

Consumers are actively seeking snacks with clear benefits, like protein and fibre intake or gut health support, says Krista Anderson, founder and CEO of Healthy on the Go.

“In 2025, the health snack industry grew by six to 6.5 per cent, while ultra-processed



snacks only grew four per cent,” notes Anderson. “There is clearly a shift in consumer consciousness and demand. Functional snacking is becoming the baseline for healthy snacks, with products now designed to deliver targeted benefits like gut health, energy, and mental focus. Ingredients such as protein, fibre, probiotics, and adaptogens are being emphasized, reflecting a broader shift toward food as daily wellness.”

Fibre-rich and prebiotic snacks are gaining traction as consumers increasingly prioritize gut health, notes Anderson, whose company recently launched a new partnership with Breakin Snacks granola bites, which are made with organic, gluten-free oats, sweetened with honey, and cooked in avocado oil.

“Overwhelmingly, the biggest trend in health snacks is the phenomenal growth of protein snacking,” says Peter VanSlyke, CEO, Great Canadian Meat Company. “Sixty-seven per cent of consumers are seeking snacks with added protein. While there is a huge surge of protein innovation across a

>>

range of categories, meat snacks continue to be the largest protein category in c-store.”

Flavours continue to become bolder and hotter and mini or bite-sized snack launches have grown 18 per cent year over year across North America, states VanSlyke.

“Great Canadian Meat Company’s new Pepperoni Poppers bring hand-to-mouth snacking combined with big, bold flavours,”

he says. “These meat snacks are also high in protein, low in sugar, and made with simple ingredients, which aren’t captured on the front of pack. What we’re seeing is a shift toward balanced decision-making. Consumers want snacks that are convenient, satisfying, and actually fuel them and protein continues to play a key role in doing that. Front-of-pack labelling raises the bar



comments VanSlyke. “We have proudly served Canadian c-stores for over 34 years.”

Research has shown that the three biggest consumer drivers are value for money, flavour, and made in Canada, says VanSlyke.

“Snackable protein is surging and protein-forward snacks are one of the fastest-growing categories with meat snacks outpacing chips and bars in dollar growth,” says VanSlyke. “Canadians are continuing to rely on snacks to get them through the day. When it comes to the afternoon snack moment consumers are turning to protein as a snack to stay full longer and keep their energy up.”

The reality that many cured, ready-to-eat meat snacks will carry high in sodium and saturated fat symbols with the new front-of-package legislation only telling part of the story, states VanSlyke.

“Canada’s new front-of-pack labelling will reshape how consumers view healthy snacking, but it risks reducing nutrition to a single

for transparency, and we support that, but healthy snacking is more than a symbol. The opportunity now is to give Canadians the full picture while continuing to improve and innovate as an industry.”

Consumers are looking for an all-encompassing product that meets their dietary needs with consideration for kosher, gluten-free, and non-GMO, says Alisha Mawani, key account manager, KIND Canada.

“Seventy-one per cent of Canadians want to eat more protein and prioritize it in their diets,” says Mawani, noting that KIND recently launched a new protein+ bar in two flavours. “Bars with functional benefits are seeing an uptick in the market today, including high protein and fibre, clean ingredients, and consideration of allergens.”

It is essential to cater to different consumer preferences and needs and highlight products that are made with whole grains, nuts, and fruits, states Mawani. **■**





Patrick Higgins, president, Propel Natural Brands notes the following as some of the key trends for healthier snacks:

Simplicity in ingredients. Consumers want recognizable, pantry-style ingredients. Better-for-you comfort foods. Healthier versions of classic snacks are performing well.

Functional snacking: Added protein, fibre, or other benefits are increasingly important, especially given the numbers of people using GLP 1 drugs.

Permissible indulgence: Consumers still want great taste, but with less guilt.

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BY MARCEL MANDIN

PROPANE CYLINDER REFILLING: A MISSED OPPORTUNITY FOR RETAIL SITE

As Canadians balance work, family and everything in between, convenience has become a driving force in daily life. Drivers are looking to accomplish more in one stop, creating an opportunity for carwash operators to add services and increase revenue per visit without significantly increasing overhead. One often overlooked option is propane dispensing.

Propane serves a wide range of everyday users, including BBQ and firepit owners, RV travellers, contractors, fleet operators and rural and remote residents. Demand is steady and often seasonal in predictable ways, and the margins for propane can be more attractive than traditional fuels.

Although propane exchange cages have become a familiar site at many gas stations, grocery stores, and convenience retailers, many customers still want to fill their cylinder.

They may not want to exchange a newer tank for one that is older or refurbished, and they may be reluctant to give up any remaining fuel – while also wanting to avoid running out. For these customers, refilling or topping up is the more practical option.

Value is another important consideration. Refill stations typically charge only for the propane dispensed and often fill closer to a cylinder's full usable capacity. In contrast, exchange programs commonly provide

less propane at a similar – or higher – price.

While exchange cages offer clear convenience and simplicity, their growth has created a gap. Refill options are becoming less common at retail locations and, in some communities, harder to find. For carwash operators, gas stations, and convenience retailers, this presents a clear opportunity to offer a service customers want but have difficulty finding.

When properly planned and managed, propane cylinder refilling can provide steady revenue, attract new customers, and differentiate your location in a competitive market.

A natural fit for carwash and fuel sites

Propane dispensing aligns well with the business model of carwash, fuel, and convenience retail locations. These sites already serve customers making routine stops. Adding propane refilling creates another reason to visit and an opportunity to increase overall spending.

Propane can also help balance seasonal demand. While usage peaks during barbecue season and colder months, there is steady year-round demand from applications such as patio heaters, camping, and small appliances.



**PROPANE REFILLING
CAN PROVIDE
STEADY REVENUE,
ATTRACT NEW
CUSTOMERS, AND
DIFFERENTIATE
YOUR LOCATION.**



Understanding the business case

Refilling requires trained personnel. Unlike exchange cages, which are largely self-serve, dispensing must be done by qualified staff. This affects staffing, service hours, and operational planning.

At the same time, these requirements create a barrier to entry. Because refilling is more involved, fewer locations offer it. Operators who invest in doing it well can build a loyal, repeat customer base.

Safety and training are non-negotiable

Propane is a safe and widely used fuel when handled properly, but it requires knowledge and attention to detail. Trained filling attendants are essential to any dispensing operation.

Attendants must be able to inspect cylinders for damage or expiry, connect equipment correctly, and fill to appropriate levels. They must also be prepared to recognize and respond to potential issues.

This is where the Canadian Propane Association's Propane Training Institute (PTI) plays a key role. The Propane Training Institute provides standardized, nationally recognized training programs specifically designed for propane handling and dispensing.

Proper training ensures staff are confident, competent, and compliant. It also builds customer trust. A knowledgeable attendant who can explain the process and answer questions provides a level of service that exchange cages cannot match.

Making it work at your site

For operators considering propane dispensing, a few practical steps can help set the foundation:

- Assess local demand: Identify gaps in refill availability in your area.

- Ensure visibility: Promote the service clearly
- Invest in training: Use recognized programs such as those offered by the PTI.
- Set clear service hours: Align availability with peak traffic times.
- Prioritize safety and compliance: Follow all applicable codes and maintain equipment regularly.


Refilling also requires some customer planning. Unlike exchange, where a cylinder can be swapped immediately, refilling depends on customers bringing in their existing tank. Encouraging customers to keep a spare cylinder can help ensure they are never without fuel – and can increase repeat visits.

A service worth offering

As refill options become less common at retail locations, their value continues to grow. Customers who prefer refilling are often loyal, informed, and willing to seek out locations that offer it.

While exchange cages provide convenience, they are a standardized, one-size-fits-all solution. Refilling gives customers more control, better value, and a higher level of service.

For carwash, gas station, and convenience operators, propane dispensing is more than an add-on – it is an opportunity to stand out, meet a clear customer need, and build consistent, repeat business.

With the right planning, proper training through the PTI, and a focus on customer experience, propane cylinder refilling can be a visible, viable, and valuable part of your operation. 

Marcel Mandin is a training development manager with the Propane Training Institute/Canadian Propane Association

FIRE RISK IS RISING. IS YOUR BUSINESS READY?

BY LINDA BUCKTON AND GINA SEITZ

As temperatures rise, so does the risk of fire – and the potential impact on your business.



For many business owners, fire risk feels like something that happens somewhere else—until it doesn't.

As temperatures rise in the spring and summer, so does the risk of fire. For businesses handling equipment, fuel, or cleaning chemicals, that risk can increase even further. What starts as a small issue can escalate quickly, leading to serious disruption and financial loss.

For small and mid-sized businesses, a single fire incident isn't just unexpected; it can be difficult to recover from.

Where Fire Risk Comes From

Fire doesn't always start the way people expect.

While wildfires often dominate headlines, many business-related fires begin internally. Common causes include:

- Electrical faults or overloaded systems
- Equipment overheating or poor maintenance
- Improper storage of flammable materials
- Human error, including unattended equipment

External risks also play a role. Fires from nearby properties or wildfires can spread quickly, especially during dry conditions.



AN ORGANIZED STORAGE AREA HELPS REDUCE FIRE RISK BY KEEPING FLAMMABLE MATERIALS PROPERLY STORED AND EXITS CLEAR.

The Real Impact of a Fire

The damage caused by fire goes far beyond what's visible.

In addition to property damage, businesses may face:

- Temporary or long-term closure
- Lost income during downtime
- Damage to equipment, inventory, and records
- Cleanup costs, including smoke and water damage
- Disruption to staff and customer relationships

Even a smaller fire can result in weeks – or months—of interruption.

Why Preparation Matters

Fires move quickly, often leaving little time to react. Having a plan in place can make a meaningful difference.

Prepared businesses are better positioned to:

- Reduce the likelihood of a fire starting
 - Respond more effectively in an emergency
 - Recover faster with less financial impact
- Preparation doesn't need to be complex, but it does need to be intentional.

Practical Ways to Reduce Fire Risk

While no business can eliminate fire risk entirely, a few practical steps can go a long way.

Maintain equipment and electrical systems

Regular inspections can help prevent overheating, faults, and failures that could lead to fire.

Store materials safely

Flammable products should be clearly labeled and stored away from heat sources or high-risk areas.

Keep spaces clear

Clutter can fuel fires and block exits. Organized workspaces support both prevention and safe evacuation.

Install and maintain fire protection systems

Smoke detectors, extinguishers, and sprinkler systems should be tested regularly to ensure they work when needed.

Train employees

Staff should understand fire safety basics, including exit locations and how to respond in an emergency.

Planning for the Unexpected

Even with strong prevention measures, fires can still occur. A clear emergency plan helps ensure employees know what to do when it matters most.

This may include:

- Evacuation procedures and designated meeting points
- Emergency contact lists
- Assigned roles and responsibilities
- A plan for communicating with staff and customers

Practicing these steps periodically can reduce confusion and improve response time.

The Role of Insurance


Fire-related losses can be significant, but insurance can play an important role in recovery. Commercial property insurance may help cover damage to buildings, equipment, and inventory, while business interruption coverage may help offset lost income during downtime.

However, not all coverage is the same. Limits, deductibles, and sub-limits can affect how much is recoverable after a loss. As operations change, it's worth reviewing coverage to ensure it still reflects current risks.

A quick annual check-in with your broker can help identify gaps before they become costly.

Staying Ahead of the Season

As spring turns to summer, fire risk becomes more relevant for many businesses. Taking time now to review safety practices, update emergency plans, and assess coverage can make a meaningful difference.

A few proactive steps today can help protect your business, your employees, and your operations when it matters most. 



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BY ANGELA ALTASS

Gas King Earns Gas Station, Convenience Store, and Carwash Awards

Gas King was recently voted **best** gas station, carwash and convenience store in the *Lethbridge Herald Best of the Best Awards* and best gas station, self-serve carwash and touchless automatic carwash at the *Medicine Hat News Reader's Choice Awards*.

"We are incredibly grateful to have taken home all three *Lethbridge Herald Best of the Best Awards* this year," says Brent Morris, president, Gas King. "Winning best carwash has been a familiar honour for us over the years and we've proudly held the best gas station title for the past few years, though that one has come and gone at times. This year made things even more special with the return of the best convenience store category after nearly 15 years and we're beyond excited to be recognized in that space too."

While the company has frequently taken top spot for the best self-serve carwash in the *Medicine Hat News Reader's Choice Awards*, achieving a clean sweep in this year's awards is special, says Morris.

"This marks a special milestone as we haven't had the same success in the other two categories until now," he states. "We're proud to be a local business serving our community. We are truly humbled by the incredible support we continue to receive from the communities

we serve. Over the years, we have dedicated significant time and energy to strengthening our image and branding."

The independent regional chain has long been recognized for giving back to the community.

"From coin boxes at checkout supporting the Don Morris/Gas King Memorial Funds for local community foundations to hosting numerous Charity Care Wash events at our carwash locations, community support is a core part of who we are," says Morris. "During the challenges of the pandemic in 2020, we turned our curb signs into this message of gratitude to our customers and community: ThanKing You for Supporting Local."

While customers can always find daily staples at their SnackKing convenience stores, there is also a priority for fresh, unique items that spark interest and encourage impulse buys, says Morris.

"We balance everyday essentials with a constant stream of innovative new products to keep our shelves exciting," he says. "Our goal is to offer a selection that is both trend-forward and competitively priced, ensuring our customers get great value along with the latest convenience store trends."



Gas King began its journey in 1985 with a clear focus on providing gasoline and diesel to the people of Southern Alberta. In the early days, it had the look and feel of a small, family-run operation.

"This changed in 2000 when we partnered with Stephen Sinclair and the team at Sinclair Design," notes Morris. "They have gone above and beyond to help transform our brand into one that reflects the presence and professionalism of a national chain."

While fuel retailing remains at the heart of the company and is deeply rooted in its history, Gas King has grown beyond fuel, states Morris.

"Our convenience stores and self-serve and automatic carwashes play a vital role in delivering a complete, high-quality experience for our customers," he says. "While fuel is our foundation, these offerings are essential to

Drive North in Lethbridge.

"To elevate this busy location, we introduced SnackKing Kitchen, a state-of-the-art facility designed to bring high-quality hot food to our customers," said Morris. "Beyond serving on-site guests, this kitchen acts as our central commissary, preparing fresh sandwiches and salads daily. These are delivered to our four other regional locations using our branded SnackKing Kitchen van, ensuring we are selling best-in-class freshness at our stores."

Since 2007, Gas King has offered its own loyalty program, King Card Rewards, operating on the KickBack Rewards/Ignite Retail Network.

"Over nearly two decades, this program has evolved through many positive

enhancements and has been well received by customers from the start," states Morris. "In mid-2024, we introduced new Rapid Cash ATMs across all Gas King/SnackKing convenience store locations. Branded as BanKing Centers, these units go beyond standard ATM services. Customers can register their King Cards directly at the machines and cardholders can also enjoy Kingo Round, a spin-to-win game offering a variety of prizes."

Offering a "triple threat" of fuel, convenience and carwashes, and also providing full-service fueling at some locations, Morris is proud that Gas King is a local business that serves its community. He adds that the company's priority is to solidify its footprint in Southern Alberta and the wider Alberta market. **G**



how we serve our communities every day."

With four locations in Lethbridge, two in Medicine Hat, and one in Picture Butte, Gas King continues to expand, with plans to open another Lethbridge location later this year or early in 2027.

"While our locations largely offer the same core goods and services, five of our seven sites include carwash facilities," notes Morris. "Some are situated along high traffic corridors, while others are more focused on serving their surrounding neighbourhoods."

Many of the locations have undergone renovations and have rebranded under the SnackKing c-store banner. In the Fall of 2022, Gas King launched a full-scale renovation at its flagship location at 213 Mayor Magrath

Highlights of Gas King History

May 1985 | Introduced Gas King at 213 Mayor Magrath Dr N, Lethbridge.

April 2001 | Launched Gas King website (gasking.com)

October 2003 | SnackKing Convenience Stores brand was unveiled.

August 2003 | Don Morris/Gas King Memorial Fund Introduced

June 2007 | KickBack Rewards were introduced at Gas King. In May 2011, this loyalty program was rebranded as King Card Rewards, but remains on the KickBack Loyalty Points network

May 2010 | Introduced Williwa slush beverages as a part of Gas King's 25th anniversary.

March 2021 | The new Gas King All Access App was listed on both the App Store & Google Play. For phase one of this new app, Clean Club car wash memberships were launched.

February 2023 | The SnackKing Kitchen concept was introduced at Eastside Gas King as renovations were substantially complete.

June 2023 | The grand opening of the first SnackKing Kitchen location inside the original Gas King on Mayor Magrath Dr N, Lethbridge, in conjunction with the grand reopening of this newly renovated site.

December 2023 | Smart Label Solutions electronic shelf labels installed at one store as a test. These electronic shelf labels are now in four SnackKing locations.

August 2024 | New BanKing Centre ATMs installed at all Gas King locations. These new kiosks were placed by Edmonton based Rapid Cash ATM. With these new ATMs customers can access cash and Crypto, and, they can also register their King Card on these units and play Kingo Round to win prizes from Gas King.

January 2026 | Gas King announced the first Gas King/SnackKing location in West Lethbridge to open in late 2026 or early 2027.



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SEASONAL MAINTENANCE FOR YOUR CARWASH DOORS

BY JIM JOHNSON

Well, it has finally started to arrive... warmer weather temps! This is the time of year we all take a deep breath and step outside after surviving another winter. While we take in the change of the seasons, it is still necessary for carwash owners to plan ahead for the harsh winter weather that will make its way back around before we know it. With that thought, spring is the best time to evaluate your doors and openers for any parts that may need to be ordered or installed. It is also a good time to do some heavy maintenance to ensure smooth operation in the months ahead.

Starting with our most popular door, the Alaska polycarbonate overhead door, good weather is the perfect time to address your doors appearance. Cleaning the door panels both inside and out with high pressure water and some cleaning solution that can be sprayed on and rinsed off. A good cleaning will also reveal if there is any wear on the panels that may need replacing.

Greasing the zerk fittings are also a necessary spring maintenance tip. Using a grease gun with marine grade grease, pump the grease into the zerk fitting. As the grease fills the fitting, water may start to filter out. It is important to keep pumping in grease until the grease starts work its way all the way through and start coming out the other side.

The next thing to examine will be the rollers

and hinges on the door. Using a petroleum-based spray lube, begin applying it to all the rollers and hinges to ensure smooth operation. It is also a good idea to spray lube on the drums that the cables run on. This will also help prevent them from corroding. It is important to check that the cables are not starting to fray as well, or they may need to be replaced.

The door track will also need to be inspected. Galvanized tracks can corrode with time and will rust through so that the rollers will fall through them. The best way to check this is to feel inside the track where the rollers run and look for any weak spots. If rusted out spots are found, it will be crucial to order a new track. There are choices available for replacing a door track. Newer advancements in plastic track have made a great choice for busy carwash bays. UHMW plastic track is not only almost zero maintenance, but it is also quiet and comes in black which makes it appealing to the eye. While this type of track is more expensive, another option would be to look into stainless steel track. Stainless track is very durable and slightly more expensive than galvanized track.

The weather stripping on the door plays an important part of keeping out dirt and debris from bad weather. Look for cracks or tears in the seam or material and if needed think about replacing old weatherstripping with a



REGULAR INSPECTION AND LUBRICATION OF ROLLERS, HINGES, AND FITTINGS ARE ESSENTIAL TO PREVENT WEAR AND ENSURE RELIABLE DOOR OPERATION.

high-quality aluminum with vinyl double flap seal.

Another popular door type is the XRS vinyl roll up door. This door requires some light maintenance and maybe a little cleaning after the long winter months. As with the Alaska polycarbonate door, the XRS vinyl door panels should be thoroughly cleaned and inspected for any tears or cracks and replaced if necessary. Same with the weather stripping, if there are cracks or tears in either the seam or the weather stripping itself it may need to be replaced.

It is very important to grease the bearings on the XRS vinyl roll up door. There should be two bearings that will require grease. Simply pump in the grease until it starts to come out. The next thing to check will be the gear box of the electric operator. It is important to check for any oil leaks and clean if necessary. Downloadable maintenance guides are


available at www.AirliftDoors.com.

While door maintenance is important, the door's opener, whether air operated or electric will require a thorough check. Air powered operators like the Magnaglide will need be cleaned along the pipe to remove any build up or chemical residue. After the pipe has been cleaned, using a petroleum-based lube should be used to continue smooth operation. Grease is not recommended on this style operator as it can attract and hold dirt to the pipe.

If a chain style air operator is being used, like the original air opener from Airlift Doors, cleaning the pipes will really be necessary only for looks. However, it is important to spray grease on the openers chain and piston rods. The chains must be flexible, if any kinks are found in the chain it should be replaced.

There are many different styles of electric door openers, but most of them are known as a direct drive. The EMAXX opener is a direct

drive opener that operates very well in the carwash environment. To do some spring-time maintenance and prolong the life of this opener, start by inspecting the gear box for any leaks. It is also important to check the oil level inside the gear box and add to it if needed. If a chain is used with your electric opener, it should also be lubed with a marine grade grease. Again, check the chain for flexibility or kinks and replace if necessary. Downloadable maintenance guides for openers can also be found at www.AirliftDoors.com.

Doors and openers are mechanical and need to continue to be used even in the summer months. By running them once a day, it will ensure that all of the moving parts keep functioning properly. 

Jim Johnson is general manager with AirLift Doors and has been with the company for more than 30 years.



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THE UNSUNG HERO OF THE CARWASH INDUSTRY: SITE DESIGN



A blended balance of hardscape and softscape defines movement and elevates curb appeal by guiding traffic naturally while creating a clean, inviting wash experience.

BY BETHANY HOGUE GRANT

There are two types of carwashes in the world:

The first type is the one we've all seen before—the carwash that looks like it was designed by someone who has never actually driven a car, much less even been to a carwash. It takes forever to figure out where the entrance is (almost surely tucked beside a dumpster or the wall of an adjacent building,) circle the building twice just to find the pay station, accidentally drive through the exit lane, and unwittingly realize you're trying out for the parallel parking lot championships when

attempting to pull into a vacuum space.

The second type practically pulls you in like a tractor beam. Drivers glide in smoothly, the flow makes perfect sense, and before you know it, you're happily buying the deluxe package while admiring how organized everything looks and feels and patting yourself on the back for the fine choice you've made.

The difference between these two experiences usually comes down to one thing: *Site design*.

And while site design might not sound glamorous, it is quietly one of the most



Clean lines, bold branding, and intuitive flow—this is a shining example of how a site can effortlessly guide customers from entry to shine while maximizing visibility on a main thoroughfare.



Small footprint, big performance—smart design maximizes traffic flow, visibility, and customer convenience even on the tightest of site locations.



A bird's-eye view of efficient site planning where traffic flow, vacuum access, stacking lanes, and the perfect landscaping mixture work together to keep cars moving and customers returning.

powerful forces in the carwash universe. Think of it as the choreography behind the dance of thousands of muddy SUVs and pollen-covered sedans.

Let's talk about why.

The Invisible Salesperson

A well-designed carwash site is like having a salesperson working 24 hours a day – except it never goes on lunch, never complains, and never takes a vacation day.

Most might think the customer experience begins when the conveyor belt starts moving. In actuality, the experience begins the moment a driver spots your wash from the road. Is it easy to drive in? Where do I go? How do I get back out? Does it look scary? If the entrance is confusing or traffic looks like the entrance to a demolition derby, drivers will often just keep on rolling by.

What makes all the difference here?

Signage – it guides people effortlessly. Drivers should know exactly where to go without needing GPS, a map, or a guy dressed in neon orange doing a show-stopping, flag waving routine. Make sure your signage is clear, concise, and easily visible, with heavy emphasis on prevalent entrance and exit signs. The more pleasing your signage is to the eye, the more revenue it will be silently lulling to your business. Let your signage do the heavy sales lifting for you.

Traffic Flow

Think of your carwash as the circulatory system - a complex network of components working together in tandem to circulate and pump each customer through quickly and efficiently.

When traffic flows smoothly, the operation (and subsequently the business) stays strong and healthy, helping you to achieve maximum revenue by keeping your customers happy and frequently returning. On the

**CLEAR ENTRY POINTS,
NATURAL TRAFFIC
FLOW, AND INTUITIVE
SIGNAGE CREATE
SOMETHING MAGICAL:
CONFIDENCE. AND
CONFIDENCE EQUALS
MORE REVENUE.**



Separated and clearly marked entry/exit points, intuitive striping, and a natural traffic look keep cars moving smoothly while maximizing safety and throughput.



A smart site design can turn acres of asphalt into organized opportunity by guiding traffic and maximizing stacking location, creating a cleaner customer experience.

flip side of that, if one component is inefficient or “clogged” - pressure builds, performance drops, and the entire system quickly feels the strain. This could lead to unhappy customers and a decrease in overall revenue.

Clear entry points, natural traffic flow, and intuitive signage create something magical: *Confidence*. And confidence equals more revenue. A happy customer will tell their friends, and they’ll tell their friends, and before you know it, you’ve drummed up quite the all-star lineup of customers just based on word of mouth alone.

Vacuums: The Social Hub of the Carwash World

If the wash tunnel is the main event, the vacuum area is the afterparty. This is where customers linger. They open the door and mill about. They discover French fries that have been unknowing passengers crammed down between the seats for an indeterminable amount of time. They contemplate life while doomscrolling (hey, we’ve all been there, right?)

In a poorly designed vacuum area, you might even end up accidentally vacuuming someone else’s car while they’re still in it, or fighting over a vacuum nozzle with another patron. A well-designed vacuum area should have plenty of space, logical layout, and easy access, to prevent you from moments of confusion, frustration, and unintentional

vacuuming of another’s property.

Beyond Steel and Pavement

A great carwash site needs both grit and greenery – because nobody ever said, “wow, I love the vibe of this concrete slab.” Hardscape handles the heavy lifting (traffic flow, durability, cleanliness), while softscape swoops in like the charming co-star, softening edges, guiding customers, and making the place feel like you’ve stumbled into an accidental oasis.

The perfect mixture helps to give your site a more elevated and retail design, all the while boosting curb appeal and attracting more traffic to your business.

Future-Proofing Your Site

The carwash industry is ever evolving. Membership programs, express tunnels, technology, and increasing traffic volumes are becoming the norm. A cramped site that works today might become the headache of tomorrow.

Great site design plans ahead. It anticipates growth, increased volume, and the realities of an ever-changing business. Flexibility in layout ensures your site continues to perform well as your business grows. It maximizes and utilizes your space in all the right ways, which will leave you patting yourself on the back for all the clever forethought you put into your site design.

The Final Rinse

At the end of the day, site design is all about performance. A well-designed carwash site:

- Moves cars efficiently
- Attracts passing traffic
- Reduces customer confusion
- Improves the overall experience
- And ultimately increases revenue by increasing traffic to your business

All without saying a single word. That’s the power of thoughtful design. When a site is done right, customers don’t even notice it. They just notice that everything feels easy. And in the carwash business, easy is everything. Easy equals max revenue, and at the end of the day, who doesn’t like to have more money in their pocket? **👍**

Bethany Hogue Grant is a true jack of all trades at Modernwash, an industry leader in carwash design and fabrication for more than 30 years. As the daughter of the company’s founder, carwash design and innovation run in her genes. Raised on hard work, creativity, and a passion for helping clients achieve their goals, she understands that great carwashes don’t happen by accident—they’re strategically designed for lasting success. Combining family legacy with hands-on experience, she helps bring projects to life from the ground up.



MAXIMIZING ASSET LIFE

The 12 Ways Investing in Lower-Quality Fueling Equipment Before Site Start-Up Costs More in the Long Run

BY STEVE STEWART

Retail and commercial petroleum site operators face similar opportunities and risks regardless of station size, particularly when balancing upfront capital investments with long-term operational and maintenance costs over a typical 15-year lifecycle.

While minimizing initial costs may seem attractive, relying on lower-quality technology often leads to higher maintenance expenses, equipment failures, environmental risks and disruptions that negatively impact customer experience and station reputation. With so much on the line, vetting fueling system equipment for pitfalls that increase the total cost of ownership is necessary to get a handle on the fully burdened cost of the equipment.

Here are the 12 ways lower-quality or outdated fueling system equipment ends up costing fuel sites more over the lifetime of the equipment.

1. Premature part fatigue, part failure, or lack of service life.

Equipment that is not built to last is strike one. Equipment that is not engineered for repairability and serviceability through modular design is strike two. Equipment that does not meet either of these criteria is strike three. Advanced fueling equipment manufacturers test parts to verify their expected service

life to tout their products' service life. For instance, 11A and 11B Automatic Nozzles from OPW Retail Fueling are lab-tested to prove they will last through 1 million cycles. By documenting and communicating this data point, OPW Retail Fueling can show fuel site operators that these nozzles have been proven to perform better than any other nozzles on the market.

Spill buckets offer another example. The more spill bucket wear parts you replace, the more value you get from these critical environmental protection assets.

2. Not durable enough to withstand operating conditions.

Weather and operating conditions vary widely from site to site. This fact may seem obvious, but it often becomes a stumbling block for fuel site operators who prioritize commodity-focused, general-purpose equipment over long-term value and the ability to reliably meet requirements dictated by their operating conditions. This is especially critical for networks expanding their footprint while simultaneously introducing new sites.

Standard-issue fueling system equipment often lacks the robustness or advanced engineering needed to meet challenging environmental conditions — whether it is engineered to handle extreme cold, high humidity, water intrusion, corrosion, or to meet the most stringent vapor recovery standards.

3. Product losses.

Contaminated fuel, leaks and spills resulting from lower-quality equipment purchases add up to bottom-line losses over the equipment's lifetime. These losses can be avoided with fueling-system products featuring advanced engineering.

For example, not all equipment is engineered to provide superior protection against water intrusion. This is particularly true of tank sumps. Watertight features not only prevent substandard fuel quality but also protect



THE TRUE VALUE OF THE PRODUCT ACTUALLY STARTS WHEN THE SERVICE FOR THE EQUIPMENT BEGINS.

against damaging phase separation in ethanol blends. When phase separation occurs, a water-alcohol mixture accumulates at the bottom of the tank, potentially damaging vehicles. This mixture must be pumped out of the tank.

To prevent a costly spill caused by an overflow during delivery, overflow prevention valves must be designed so that an automatic, positive shut-off occurs during an overflow without relying on delivery personnel to ensure overflow protection. The valves should also be engineered so that overrides cannot be broken or abused.

4. Fuel incompatibility.

At OPW Retail Fueling, we are consistently surprised by how often equipment is ordered for a fuel it is not designed to handle. What's more concerning is that this error is occurring in relation to today's primary fuels (E10, E15, E85, diesel and biodiesel blends).

Not only should fuel site operators invest in equipment to properly transfer today's fuels, but they should also prepare for future fuels such as E20, E30, B20-B50 and renewable diesel if they want to get the most value out of their equipment.

5. Concrete demolition is required to upgrade, repair or replace equipment.

Breaking concrete to replace, repair or upgrade underground fueling system equipment was once unavoidable, causing fuel sites to lose days or weeks of downtime and fuel sales. Today, fueling system equipment manufacturers are making it possible to service or replace underground equipment without demolishing concrete. For instance, spill containers and fully integrated, double-wall flexible piping systems from OPW Retail Fueling can be repaired or replaced without breaking concrete, significantly reducing installation time and costs.

6. Servicing or installing equipment is labor-intensive or error-prone, making it more expensive than necessary.

A saying sometimes heard from fueling equipment manufacturers is, "The true value of the product actually starts when the service for the equipment begins."

If you are overseeing maintenance at a fuel site or a network of sites, choosing equipment designed to minimize the number and duration of service calls needed to install or service the equipment will save time and labor costs. Advanced tank and dispenser sumps are two fueling system components that offer fuel site operators this efficiency. Consider this:

Today's pre-plumbed dispenser sumps arrive on-site with the top, emergency shear valves, entry fittings, stabilizer bars, elbows, tees, flex connectors or rigid risers, all factory-installed and tested. This feature significantly streamlines installation and eliminates errors in the field.

Tank sumps that ship with factory-installed fittings, conduit, ports and electrical wiring boxes reduce the amount of configuration needed at the time of installation. Ensuring that proper torque is applied, appropriate cutting tools are used, and the correct sealing compounds are incorporated during the manufacturing process eliminates many potential errors that could occur in the field.

7. Avoidable ancillary/pass-through costs.

Some costs that factor into a part's total cost of ownership are harder to see than others, such as those incurred during equipment shipment or distributor-level inefficiencies. For example, new segmented overflow prevention valves allow for more compact packaging and cost-efficient transport, helping distributors, petroleum equipment service companies and fuel-site operators avoid overlength fees. The segmented design also reduces the potential for damage during transit and makes storage easier.

Dispenser sumps offer another example. Advanced composite manufacturing processes now make it possible for dispenser sumps to neatly stack and nest within one another. This ability permits efficient use of space in a warehouse, in a construction trailer or on a jobsite. If distributors can maximize their warehouse space and optimize how they load their delivery trailers, this can contribute to lower shipping costs.

8. Inspecting and testing equipment is cumbersome and time-consuming.

Access to system components is critical. Advanced tank sumps, for example, enable technicians to inspect conduit lines high in the sump and access the electrical wiring box without having to enter the confined sump area.

Equipment designed to streamline traditional testing processes also helps lower costs. Advanced overflow prevention valves enable technicians to test and verify the valve without removing it from the tank. This design feature allows testing to be completed in about one

>>

minute, compared to one hour for traditional valves. By providing the ability to isolate and air-test the interstitial space of double-wall flexible piping using integrated test ports in the fitting with air stems and junction test kits, manufacturers help operators validate pipe tightness in minutes.

9. Fires, spills, overflows, leaks or misfilling incidents occur.

While the core mission of all fueling system equipment is to protect the environment and mitigate the risk to people who interact with it, some fueling equipment offers better protection than others.

Without question, fire prevention, preventing overfills and maintaining the integrity of underground storage equipment are of the utmost importance. But even hanging hardware can help prevent a costly mishap.

For example, nozzles with flow-lock technology will shut off if they fall out of a vehicle and are tipped up, limiting spillage and unsafe conditions. DEF/AdBlue nozzles with a misfilling prevention device help users avert costly misfilling incidents, such as accidentally inserting the DEF/AdBlue nozzle into the diesel tank.

Breakaways also perform a critical safety function. If a drive-off occurs, the breakaway not only helps prevent costly damage to the dispenser if the vehicle were able to dislodge it, but it also prevents fuel from spilling out of the dispenser hose. "Dry" breakaways with double-poppet designs go a step further, sealing both the nozzle hose and the dispenser hose to prevent fuel in the nozzle hose from spilling out.

10. Downtime is exacerbated.

Breakaways also illustrate how equipment design affects downtime. Amid this age of distracted driving (and fueling), some gas station operators estimate that drive-offs occur almost monthly. Dispensers with single-use breakaways that separate to protect the dispenser and prevent a spill after a drive-off must be taken out of service until a qualified petroleum equipment technician can install a replacement breakaway. User-friendly reconnectable breakaways with "push, twist, click" technology enable an operator to quickly and easily reconnect the breakaway so it can be reused. Reconnectable breakaways can get the dispenser back to pumping fuel without the time and expense of a service call. Reconnectable breakaways pay for themselves after two to three drive-offs per breakaway.

11. Brand experience erosion.

Fueling a vehicle is a chore. Ensuring a quick, comfortable, and above all, trouble-free fueling experience is essential. The adage "you only get one chance to make a first impression" absolutely applies to a retail fuel site, and, more precisely, to the dispenser and nozzle. To help retailers ensure a positive experience at the pump, OPW Retail Fueling recently enhanced its 11A and 11B Automatic Nozzles. An easy-open feature with reduced opening force, an ergonomically designed grip with a new barrel cover and lever, and an updated scuff guard help provide users a comfortable fueling experience that instills confidence in the brand.

12. Customer churn.

Equipment problems on the forecourt are an absolute turn-off. Ask yourself: how likely are you to return to a station with bagged nozzles, vacuum trucks constantly coming and going, malfunctioning payment terminals, slow pumps, inaccurate fuel metering or substandard flow control?

According to data from Upside, C-store

operators who prevent customer churn establish a competitive advantage that will boost the bottom line. The data indicates that earning just one additional monthly visit from fuel customers who are not yet committed to that store's brand could increase revenue by 88 per cent.

Fueling system equipment backed by mediocre engineering usually produces mediocre results over the lifetime of the equipment. Not only does less advanced equipment distract operators from their core retail business, but it also sabotages lucrative in-store sales opportunities. With so much at stake, it is imperative at the outset of a site start-up to weigh the short-term savings of less expensive equipment against the long-term value higher-quality equipment will provide. **■**

Steve Stewart is the senior Canadian & Caribbean sales manager for OPW Retail Fueling, based in Smithfield, NC, USA. He can be reached at steve.stewart@opwglobal.com. For more information on OPW Retail Fueling, go to opwretailfueling.com.

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FUELED BY EXCELLENCE

THE DIRT BELOW AND ITS IMPACT ON PIT MAINTENANCE



BY NICOLE CARSON

As carwash operators continue to prioritize sustainability, cost savings, and regulatory compliance, water reclaim systems have become a key component of modern carwash design. These systems reduce water consumption, helping sites operate more efficiently while meeting regulatory demands.

However, without proper maintenance of center trenches and underground reclaim tanks, even the most advanced reclaim systems can quickly become inefficient, or worse, damaged.

Defining “The Pit:” More than One Meaning

Ask a carwash operator about “the pit,” and you might get different answers. In many cases, the term refers to the center trench running through the wash bay. This is where water, dirt, and debris first collect. In other contexts, “the pit” refers to underground

reclaim tanks where water is stored and prepared for reuse.

This is similar to how industry terms are often used interchangeably, even when they refer to different parts of a system. Both the center trench and the underground reclaim tanks are critical to system performance. As many carwash operators learn, what’s below the surface is easy to overlook until it starts affecting everything above.

The Problem Beneath the Surface

Every vehicle that enters a wash introduces contaminants such as oil, organic material, and road debris. While reclaim systems are designed to manage this load, they rely heavily on proper site maintenance, including cleaning the center trench and underground tanks.

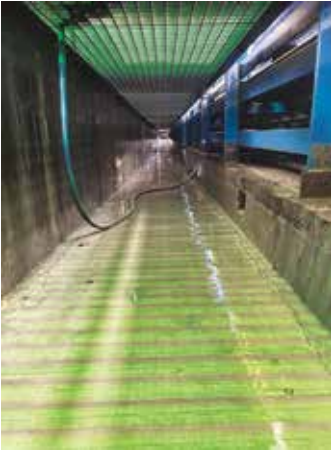
When pits are not cleaned routinely, sludge builds up in tanks, debris bypasses separation stages, and contaminants are

pulled back into pumps and equipment. This accumulation occurs gradually, often going unnoticed until performance declines, leading to reduced water quality, increased maintenance costs, and potential equipment failure.

Left unchecked, these contaminants begin moving through the system, adversely affecting wash quality. As conditions worsen, operators may assume the reclaim system is failing and switch back to fresh water. Consequently, this undermines the very system put in place to save water and money.

Condition-Based Center Trench Cleaning

The key to effective center trench cleaning is understanding that it should be condition-based, not calendar-based. The center trench serves as the frontline of debris collection, handling the heaviest solids and typically requiring the most frequent attention.



WHEN PITS ARE NOT CLEANED ROUTINELY, SLUDGE BUILDS UP IN TANKS, DEBRIS BYPASSES SEPARATION STAGES, AND CONTAMINANTS ARE PULLED BACK INTO PUMPS AND EQUIPMENT.

A high-volume express wash handling hundreds of vehicles per day will accumulate debris faster than a low-volume site, particularly in regions with snow, salt, or unpaved roads.

While some operators plan cleaning at set intervals throughout the year, high-volume express sites require a more responsive approach. Factors to consider include car count, seasonal conditions, and visible buildup or flow restrictions. Cleaning frequency can vary widely, so consistency and close attention to site conditions matter most.

Scheduled Cleaning of Underground Reclaim Tanks

While trench maintenance varies, underground reclaim tanks follow a more predictable pattern. Over time, particles that pass through initial separation stages settle at the bottom of these tanks, forming dense sludge layers. If left unchecked, this buildup reduces system capacity and increases the likelihood of contaminant recirculation.

Unlike trench debris, this material is not easily removed in-house. Many sites rely on professional services to clean tanks safely and thoroughly. A general guideline is to service tanks on a scheduled basis with frequency determined by usage, inspection findings, and local requirements. Warning signs such as odour,

poor water clarity, or repeated equipment failures should prompt immediate inspection.

A Simple Practice with Significant Impact

As mentioned earlier, when sludge and debris accumulate, it doesn't simply stay in one place. Rather than managing contamination, the system recirculates it, allowing it to reach spray nozzles and affect wash performance. The result is increased wear and maintenance demands, leading to costly repairs and downtime.

In an industry focused on efficiency and sustainability, cleaning the center trench and underground reclaim tanks is a straightforward maintenance practice with outsized benefits. Ultimately, the effectiveness of a water reclaim system isn't determined solely by its design or technology, but by how well a site is maintained. **■**

Nicole Carson is the general manager at SoBrite Technologies, an OEM manufacturer of water treatment systems for carwash applications. She oversees day-to-day operations and production planning, ensuring efficient order fulfillment and on-time delivery. In this role, she has firsthand insight into system performance within carwash operations.

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HOW AI IS CHANGING ONLINE BEHAVIOUR FOR CARWASH BUSINESSES



Not long ago, AI burst onto the small business scene like a brand-new wash – flashy, powerful, and impossible to ignore.

BY MELOHLINGER

Suddenly, businesses could create logos, social posts, videos, and ads in minutes. For small operators and family-owned carwash businesses in particular, it felt like a major upgrade and a huge time saver. It was exhilarating. That excitement is still very real, but we're starting to see it evolve. As artificial intelligence has become widely accessible, tasks that once required agencies, long timelines, or specialized skills are now fast and affordable. For many carwashes, AI introduces more tools, less friction, and new ways to compete in crowded markets. It makes it easier to compete in digital marketing and flatlines the cost to compete.

Now, as AI becomes normal rather than novel, both businesses and customers are responding differently to its use in social media and digital marketing. This shift isn't a rejection of AI; it's better described as discernment. Initial curiosity is increasingly paired with skepticism (and at times frustration) as people become more aware of how often AI is shaping what

they see online. Businesses that are paying attention are learning where AI genuinely adds value, particularly in creating more relevant and personalized experiences, and where it can quietly dull the shine of authenticity and trust if overused.

At the same time, there's a growing emotional layer to this conversation. In some communities, especially those facing the expansion of large data centers, AI has become tied to broader concerns about resource use - particularly water. In those areas, residents are protective of their local resources and may view both carwashes and AI infrastructure as potential threats. As a result, content that feels overtly or obviously AI-generated is sometimes met with resistance or avoidance. This makes thoughtful, community-aware personalization more important than ever, reinforcing the value of marketing that feels local, human, and grounded in real-world connection.

Across AI use as a whole, one of the most noticeable shifts is how deeply personalized online experiences have become, and how differently that personalization is perceived across countries. Our Canadian customers tend to be more aware of how their data is used in AI systems and approach these tools with

IN A CROWDED DIGITAL LANDSCAPE, FEELING REAL REMAINS THE STRONGEST DIFFERENTIATOR, BECAUSE IN THE END, PEOPLE DON'T FALL IN LOVE WITH ALGORITHMS; THEY FALL IN LOVE WITH THE TRUST THEY FEEL FOR THE SERVICE AND THE CARWASH BRANDS.

greater caution, particularly when it comes to privacy and consent. U.S.-based clients, on the other hand, are generally more focused on how AI can save time and reduce costs, often prioritizing efficiency and speed over data protections.

In both markets, AI-driven platforms shape what people see with remarkable precision, reinforcing preferences, habits, and familiar patterns. From a business perspective, this level of personalization can be extremely useful. The challenge comes when many brands rely on the same tools and techniques, causing content to blend together. Customers did not consciously recognize AI-generated or AI-assisted content at first, but now we see specific generations being able to point it out immediately. Some people aren't able to identify AI use, but they can sense when something feels generic. For local businesses that rely on familiarity, trust, and community connection, that lack of differentiation can be a costly marketing risk.

Design and communication are where the shift around AI has become most visible. On the communication side, AI-powered replies, chatbots, and assisted writing tools have dramatically sped things up, helping businesses respond faster and stay consis-

video tools first arrived, they performed extremely well—they were eye-catching, clean, and fast to produce, and many still rank well on social platforms today. However, performance doesn't always equal connection. Customers are becoming increasingly skilled at recognizing AI-generated visuals, from the lighting and symmetry to the "too-perfect" details, and we're already seeing more people scroll past content that feels artificial, particularly from local businesses. As AI becomes more familiar, we expect this drop-off to grow, with curiosity gradually giving way to caution, and what once felt exciting now sometimes reading as impersonal.

This trend is especially clear in the carwash space. Operators regularly tell us that AI images don't feel like their wash. Carwash customers want to see real bays, real tunnels, real locations, and real people. When AI-enhanced marketing replaces reality rather than supporting it, it can feel like a misrepresentation—both to the business owner and to the customer. In a category built on trust and habit, that disconnect matters. A brand can't afford to feel removed from the place customers drive past every day. At the same time, on the data side, we still see customers interacting more frequently with AI-generated images and videos than with real ones. However, those interactions aren't always positive. In many cases, engagement comes in the form of comments calling out or questioning a business's use of AI, reinforcing the idea that visibility doesn't always equal approval.

In carwash brand design, logos are another area where AI helps and harms. AI-generated logos are often appealing at first glance. They're fast, inexpensive, and helpful for exploring design directions. As a starting point, AI is an excellent brainstorming tool. The issue comes when that first draft becomes the final answer. Many AI logos share the same visual language, making them easy to spot and easy to forget. Customers are beginning to tune them out. We still strongly believe AI is a great place to begin the logo process, but before finalizing, involving a designer to personalize, refine, and add character makes all the difference. That final pass is what turns a decent logo into something distinctive and ownable.

Social media is where AI's impact is both most positive and most risky for small businesses. On the positive side, AI has made content creation far more accessible: Writing captions, generating ideas, and

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tent—but these tools work best when used with sensitivity to tone and intent. Messages that feel overly polished or automated can create emotional distance, especially in industries where trust, familiarity, and routine matter. Efficiency is valuable, but people still want to feel like there's a human on the other end of the conversation. In design, a similar pattern has emerged. When AI image and

planning posts no longer require hours and hours of effort. For carwash operators juggling staffing, weather, maintenance, and memberships, that's a meaningful advantage. AI lowers the barrier to showing up consistently online. But on those same platforms, social media is where "too AI" becomes obvious fastest and where customer descent is the quickest, most visible, and the loudest. Content that looks overly produced, overly corporate, or overly optimized tends to underperform with local audiences right now. In this economy, people gravitate toward brands that feel familiar, friendly, and human. Community-facing content with real photos, staff moments, local references, and simple slightly crappy videos consistently performs better than polished, generic visuals. AI works best behind the scenes: Helping with ideas, drafts, and structure, while the final output still feels grounded in real life.

One of the most unusual aspects of these digital changes is that there's also a broader trust issue shaping all of this. As deepfakes, fake reviews, and synthetic accounts become more common, customers are approaching online content with greater caution, and even legitimate businesses are feeling the impact. Anything that feels overly artificial can quickly trigger doubt.

The takeaway isn't that AI is a problem for small businesses - it's that AI shouldn't be the star of the show. The businesses succeeding right now are using it quietly and intentionally to speed up workflows, improve communication, explore ideas, and reduce friction, while letting real people, real places, and real stories do the talking. As AI continues to evolve, the brands that stand out won't be the ones using it the most, but the ones using it the smartest, balancing efficiency with authenticity and technology with humanity. In a crowded digital landscape, feeling real remains the strongest differentiator, because in the end, people don't fall in love with algorithms; they fall in love with the trust they feel for the service and the carwash brands. That's what keeps them coming back. ■



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Mel Ohlinger is the CEO of OhmCo, a carwash marketing agency based in Wisconsin. With over 20 years in marketing, design, and web development, she's a creative force in the industry. A former cryptologic technician for the NSA, Mel's background in Morse code and precision laid the groundwork for her expertise in branding and strategy. Holding a BFA from UW Oshkosh, she blends artistry with tech-savvy solutions. Beyond work, she's a painter, aspiring author, and proud mom of two. Under Mel and her husband Mike's leadership, OhmCo helps carwash businesses stand out, grow, and succeed.

ANNOUNCEMENTS



Washworld, Inc. Announces New Distributor

DE PERE, Wisconsin: Washworld is proud to announce they have recently added Elite Carwash Solutions LLC as a new member to their distributor network in Canada. They will be focusing on premium carwash equipment sales, service and chemical solutions in Ontario. Elite Carwash Solutions prides themselves on being a team of passionate experts dedicated to delivering state-of-the-art custom car wash solutions making them an ideal partner to represent Washworld and their products.

Washworld, Inc. manufactures touch-free carwash systems (Razor XR-7, Razor, Razor Double Barrel, and Razor HyperForce), soft touch carwash systems (Profile LXR, Profile ST and Profile MAX) and hybrid carwash systems (Profile Apex) For more information, visit www.washworldinc.com.



National Carwash Solutions Announces Partnership with Chemical Guys

Grimes, IA – National Carwash Solutions (NCS) has announced a new partnership with Chemical Guys, bringing a premium retail detailing program to professional carwash operators.

The program enables operators to introduce branded retail products on-site, expanding beyond exterior-only services and creating a more complete car care offering within the existing wash footprint.

Designed to maximize existing traffic and expand reach, the program drives higher revenue per visit while attracting new customers who already trust the Chemical Guys brand.

Chemical Guys is among the fastest-growing brands in the car care and detailing category, driven by strong consumer demand for premium products. Through this partnership, NCS serves as the

exclusive distributor of Chemical Guys products to the professional carwash industry.

Expanding the Value of Each Car On-site

- With Chemical Guys retail integration, operators can:
- Generate new revenue without adding throughput
- Increase average ticket and revenue per car
- Differentiate with a recognized consumer brand
- Enhance membership value through add-ons and kits

Attract new, brand-loyal customers

"This partnership is about helping operators get more from the traffic they already have," said Jesse Wurth, CEO of NCS. "By bringing Chemical Guys into the wash environment, operators can increase revenue, elevate the customer experience, and stand out in a competitive market while attracting new customers who already have a connection to the brand."

Chemical Guys brings strong consumer awareness and digital reach, including more than one million followers across major social platforms, over 1.1 million YouTube subscribers, and the top-ranked TikTok Shop presence in the car care category.

"Chemical Guys has built a loyal following by combining high-quality, innovative products with education and community," said Mohit Gulranjani, EVP of Direct Channels. "Partnering with NCS allows us to extend that into the professional carwash channel in a way that creates value for both operators and their customers."

The partnership will be featured at The Car Wash Show, where Chemical Guys will be showcased within the NCS booth, giving operators a first look at the retail program in action.

The partnership reflects a broader shift toward higher-value service models, where operators increase revenue per visit and strengthen retention without relying solely on volume growth.

Independent Convenience Store Leaders Unite to Strengthen Industry Voice

TORONTO – The Independent Convenience Store Alliance (ICSA) has announced a new collaborative effort with the Ontario Convenience Stores Association (OCSA) and the United Korean Commerce & Industry Association (UKCIA), marking a significant step forward in aligning independent convenience store operators across Canada around shared priorities and a unified advocacy approach.

The agreement follows a series of recent meetings in Ottawa, where representatives from all three organizations met with federal officials to discuss key issues impacting the sector, most notably the federal government's 2024 decision to restrict the sale of nicotine pouches to pharmacies.

Industry leaders identified the restriction as a clear example of

an unfair and unfounded regulatory burden placed on small, independent businesses. Prior to the change, convenience stores demonstrated a strong track record of responsible retailing, including strict age verification and controlled product placement. Since the ban was implemented, retailers report a rapid rise in unregulated and untaxed black market products entering communities across the country.

"Independent convenience stores have long been trusted to sell age-restricted products responsibly," said Hani Al-Shikarchy, spokesperson for ICSA and owner of Oakridge Minimart in London, Ontario. "Policies like the nicotine pouch restriction ignore that reality and penalize responsible retailers while unintentionally fueling the growth of an unregulated market."

Through this new collaboration, ICSA, OCSA, and UKCIA will work

together to raise awareness of these impacts, coordinate advocacy efforts, and present a stronger, more unified voice to policymakers at all levels of government.

"By coming together, we are more effective and more credible," said Kenny Shim, spokesperson for UKCIA and owner of BusyBee King Mart in Toronto. "Our members are facing the same challenges across Canada. Aligning our efforts ensures those realities are clearly understood by decision-makers."

As part of this coordinated effort, the three associations will actively support the national "Bring Pouches Back" campaign and encourage independent store owners across Canada to send letters to their premiers.

The collaboration will extend beyond nicotine pouch advocacy to include a broader range of regulatory and operational issues affecting independent

retailers. A central focus will be the development and sharing of best practices that reinforce the industry's reputation as responsible retailers – particularly in the sale of age-restricted products such as tobacco, lottery, and other age restricted products.

"Convenience store owners take pride in the role they play in their communities," said Terry Yaldo, board chair of OCSA and owner of Midway Convenience in Windsor, Ontario. "This collaboration allows us to not only advocate together, but to continuously improve and demonstrate the high standards we uphold every day."

By creating a forum for ongoing coordination, the three organizations aim to strengthen communication across the sector, equip store owners with practical tools and guidance, and ensure independent operators have a clear, consistent, and credible voice in public policy discussions.

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