

ECONOMY & SPENDING

MORE CHANGES TO GROCERY SHOPPING

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If grocery shopping was ever a casual affair, it is no longer. So many studies in the past two years have tracked the evolution of purposeful buying with a widening array of savings strategies that the trade might think it understands the latest consumer psyche.

Trouble is, that understanding would be short-lived because the cumulative effects of this lengthy recession continue to spawn change – not only in buying habits but also in the ways people relate to food and food shopping. The Grocery Shopping In The New Economy 2010 study from Vertis Communications, for example, notes that:

- 57% of men regard themselves as chief grocery shoppers, up from 47% in 2006; this gain is fairly consistent across adult age groups. This compares with 85% of women in both years of comparison.
- A majority of adults still use newspaper inserts to decide where to shop for groceries and help shape their shopping lists. Although, just 46% of men ages 18 to 34 do so. (Vertis noted corroboration with the National Grocers Association 2010 Consumer Survey Report, conducted by SupermarketGuru.com, in which 66% of respondents said they seek grocery specials in newspapers.)
- More than 90% of women age 35 and up and about 80% of men age 35 and up reads direct mail from grocery stores. Three-quarters of these readers redeem direct mail coupons.
- By contrast, just 13% of adult consumers visited a retailer's website to plan a store trip within a month prior to answering the survey.
- Conventional supermarkets remain the preferred choice for perishables (cited by 64.9% of Vertis survey respondents), but encroachment is visible: 19.1% say they usually buy perishables in discount stores, and 8.1% cite wholesale clubs.
- Indeed, 63% of adults buy perishables at two or more different stores on average within a two-week period; this behavior increases with the presence of children in the household.
- The supermarket, discounter and club channels are much closer in their ability to attract trips for non-perishables: just 43.4% for supermarkets vs. 38.6% for discounters and 14.1% for wholesale clubs.
- Price is overwhelmingly the number one factor in store selection among adult men and women in all age groups.

Until the United States can put the recession in its rear-view mirror, consumers will be forced to put price first, The Lempert Report believes. As a result, the niceties of convenience, special order services and similar appeals offered by conventional supermarkets will go just so far in stemming their trip erosion. They must keep these services up, of course, while they find ways to sharpen their price image as competitive strategy number one.