With more than 10 million combined ratings and reviews, GasBuddy users are speaking loud and clear about what does and doesn’t work in convenience stores. And we listened to their feedback. By avoiding these 8 common mistakes and utilizing the tools available to GasBuddy Business Pages Partners, you can help your stores stand apart from the competition.

8 SLOW WIFI

Free WiFi isn’t just for coffee shops and restaurants. Leading convenience stores use it to attract customers and enhance their experience when they stay to enjoy a meal or snack.

But today’s customers don’t view free WiFi as a perk—they see it as an expectation. Seventy-seven percent of Americans own a smartphone—including approximately 90% of Millennials, the largest demographic—and 51% own a laptop computer. Mobile data plans often provide restrictive limits on bandwidth, and customers expect free WiFi at businesses when they’re on the go. According to a survey by Devicescape, 62% of businesses that added free WiFi saw an increase in customer dwell time. Fifty percent said that customers spent more money.

Unfortunately, some stores make the mistake of installing slow and spotty WiFi—or requiring customers to jump through hoops to sign in to the network. These negative and frustrating experiences are often worse than no WiFi.

“Many of today’s retailers offer their own mobile apps with connected features, and a bad WiFi connection can turn a positive customer service experience into a negative one,” says Jeff Peters, GasBuddy’s Senior Director of Retail Services Operations. “If customers have issues retrieving their deals, ordering from an app, or viewing loyalty rewards on a bad connection that the store has offered, then it becomes a negative reflection on the store itself.”
DIRTY RESTROOMS

Bad restrooms are bad for business, and consumers will talk about them in a public forum—such as online ratings and reviews. Dirty or poorly maintained restrooms are the number one reason for negative reviews on GasBuddy. This can cause serious damage to a brand’s reputation as potential customers encounter these reviews and form associations.

“I see this scenario a lot: the store is wonderful, but the restrooms are terrible,” says Frank Beard, GasBuddy’s Analyst/Evangelist for Convenience Store and Retail Trends. “This hurts their rating on GasBuddy and creates a negative perception of the entire business.”

Many successful brands such as Kwik Trip and Buc-ee’s view restroom quality as a core business strategy. Buc-ee’s owner Arch “Beaver” Aplin personally designs the restrooms in his stores. At Kwik Trip, a clean restroom promise from CEO Don Zietlow is posted near the sinks.

IGNORING THE FORECOURT

The forecourt experience is the “first handshake” that welcomes customers to your store. It can enhance your brand’s reputation and drive the sale of in-store items. But when it’s done wrong, it can push customers away and harm your reputation.

Rather than viewing the free amenities like wiper fluid and squeegees, paper towels, and hand sanitizer as something to monitor when other duties are finished, prioritize their upkeep.

Additionally, take advantage of the average 2-3 minute fueling time to promote the full range of your store’s products. Not just pizza and soda, but everything—even your healthful options. Your customers are a captive audience while they stand at the pump. Use that time to make the case for why they should come inside the store.
For convenience stores with foodservice, it's critical to adopt practices that are standard in the restaurant industry.

A recent ABC Action News investigation in Tampa publicized multiple problems at gas stations that were easily preventable by cleaning the soda fountain nozzles daily, draining and cleaning the ice bin, and cleaning the coffee machines. Instead, investigators found slime and mold. These simple mistakes led to untold harm to their reputations.

Restaurants also encourage their employees to upsell. One simple ask—with each order—is all it takes. It's also a great way to highlight new items and move limited and time-sensitive inventory. At Sheetz, the touchscreen ordering systems asks customers if they'd like to add one of three different items.

Additionally, restaurants are in the habit of saying “yes”. When customers arrive as you're switching from breakfast to lunch and order a breakfast sandwich, employees shouldn't act inconvenienced or refuse. The point isn't to switch to lunch—it's to provide what the customer wants.

Everyone knows that employee turnover is a challenge. Many employees traditionally seek positions at the store-level on an impermanent basis: a first job, a way to make money during school, or perhaps a part-time position for extra income.

This leads some stores to avoid investing adequate time and resources into training. But this approach can lead to severe issues with engagement and customer service. The bottom line is that employees won't value your store if they don't feel valued.

Many leading brands invest heavily in finding, training, and keeping the right employees. When describing the growth of Rutter's, CEO Scott Hartman told CSP “People are our focus inside the plan: how we hire the best people, retain the best people, build bench strength.”

With GasBuddy Business Pages, you can track high-performing locations and reward those employees for excellence in customer service. You can also utilize ratings and reviews data to determine which locations require additional training.
By differentiating themselves with unique products and services, convenience stores can stand apart from the competition and become popular destinations. Wawa is famous for hoagies, Sheetz for its MTO kitchens, 7-Eleven for slurpees, Casey’s General Stores for pizza, and Buc-ee’s for its enormous stores and clean restrooms. This strategy can also generate intense brand loyalty and repeat business.

But some stores fail to differentiate themselves. This not only puts them at a competitive disadvantage with nearby convenience stores, but it makes it difficult to lure away business from quick-service restaurants and coffee shops during peak hours.

This lack of differentiation also limits the opportunities presented by online ratings and reviews. Stores with unique offerings typically generate enthusiastic reviews, whereas customers at more basic stores have less to say.

Convenience stores face a gas penalty: the perception that their products—especially their prepared food—is somehow of a lower quality due to the presence of fuel pumps. A messy store and forecourt does little to overcome this challenge.

Overflowing trash, oil spots, unswept floors, greasy tables in the indoor and outdoor seating—it all detracts from the customer experience.

### MESSY STORES

Failure to stand out

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IGNORING ONLINE REVIEWS

Not only do GasBuddy reviews provide unprecedented insight into brand perceptions and customer experiences, but they highlight issues that need attention now—and can harm brand reputations if left unaddressed.

For example, multiple reviews have been left about broken security seals on card readers at the pumps. Does this mean skimmers are installed? Perhaps. But when potential customers encounter those reviews on a station profile, it’s sure to influence their perception of store—and perhaps the brand.

GasBuddy Business Pages partners have the ability to respond to these reviews. A simple response might look like this:

“Thank you for bringing this issue to our attention! We launched a thorough investigation of each fuel pump, and we determined that no skimmers were present. Additional safety measures have been put into place.”

GasBuddy Business Pages partners also have access to this information through the Dirty, Broken, and Dangerous report—a weekly update of the most urgent negative reviews. It’s an effective way to ensure that time-sensitive reviews aren’t overlooked.

Additionally, some stores generate reviews of the same repetitive complaints. Dirty restrooms, messy atmosphere, empty cleaning supplies at the pumps; by ignoring these reviews and continuing to make the same mistakes, they cause untold damage to their brand’s reputation.

This list of 8 common mistakes is part of the GasBuddy Guidebook: a playbook for fuel marketers and convenience store chains. To request a copy, email pages@gasbuddy.com

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