TECH TRAILBLAZING

MAY 2023

CTVG
CONVENIENCE TECHNOLOGY
VISION GROUP

We are the Convenience Technology Vision Group (CTVG), a group of invited leaders of the convenience industry who have volunteered our time to help our fellow retailers, solution providers and product suppliers. The only reason we gather is to discuss, debate and share our experiences and ideas. Each of us is offering our personal opinions. We are not looking for "group think" — we are promoting problem solving and looking to the future. We make our conversations available to everyone in the industry through CTVG Vision Reports. These reports will help you better understand current challenges, solutions, and opportunities while giving you access to different opinions and perspectives, regardless of the size of your business.

Convenience Technology Vision Group is part of the Vision Group Network, whose mission is to gather the best minds in the industry, put them in a virtual room, and let the ideas and opinions develop.

The **CTVG Vision Report** is comprised of two parts:

CTVG Views provides an overview of the conversation with additional research for extra context — something that cannot be done in real time.

In the Room with CTVG provides you with the entire conversation so that you can be "in the room" with us, rather than reading selected quotes and paraphrasing.

We highly recommend that you read both components.

The main topics in this CTVG Vision Report: having one integrated, effective dashboard; tech to manage and incentivize workforce; data collection; AI; back-office technology; what to do about legacy systems; tech solutions for smaller retailers; and EV charging technology.

CONVENIENCE TECHNOLOGY
VISION GROUP

Tech Trailblazing

A CONVENIENCE TECHNOLOGY VISION GROUP DISCUSSION

CTVG
CONVENIENCE TECHNOLOGY
VISION GROUP

Tech afficionados may snicker at the notion of convenience retailers as trailblazers in technology but Ed Collupy, CTVG advisor/facilitator and principal, Collupy Systems Solutions, stands firm that c-store retailers were — and could again be — tech trailblazers.

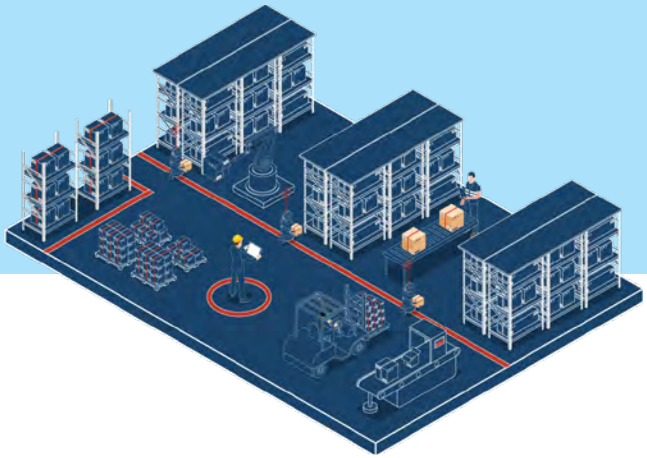
Collupy conceded it has been a while since the industry's last real leap with technology, which he pinpointed as 1973 and the introduction of pay-at-the-pump technology. At that time, "we took the concept — self-service — and brought it to life in such a way that it became a model for so many other payment-driven consumer transactions," he noted during his presentation for Convenience Technology Vision Group members on March 3, 2023.

Fifty years have now gone by since that last tech acceleration. Still, Collupy believes the industry could return to the spotlight as tech leaders; he points to the pandemic as a period that propelled the industry forward with technology once again. COVID-19 gave the convenience retailing industry a bit of a kick in the butt technology-wise, steering many retailers in the direction of tech-backed customer components such as mobile ordering. Slow-to-market developments became need-it-now operational elements.

Convenience companies were implementing these platforms faster than ever, Collupy said. Examples include advancements with self-checkout, curbside pickup programs and delivery options. It created some tech momentum for an industry that had fallen behind the curve on the tech front compared to adjacent industry segments, notably foodservice and grocery.

While COVID may get credit for catapulting less-touch, less-friction elements in the name of operational efficiency and safety/protection against the virus, the question now is, what has lasted? What level of implementation risk are convenience operators currently taking? Which programs created stickiness with consumers?

Retailers in all segments are sorting through these questions today now that consumers are back to shopping in person. Indeed, there continues to be a push toward a **digital transformation of retail** overall. It becomes a question of how to connect the digital experience with the more traditional shopping trip.



Debating the AI Hype

Could AI be the next epic event in our industry?

"AI has already made a huge impact and it has the potential to revolutionize, but it's important that we recognize the limitations of AI and understand that it is not a replacement for human intelligence," said Collupy. He believes AI can help the journey to greater customization, moving it from mass curation to segments, and then to the individual. However, he noted, "AI marketing initiatives will still require the marketer to bring to the table their creativity, their ability to emotionally connect with consumers, and most importantly, their intuition."

Where artificial intelligence can help, in Lorne Brockway's view, is with back-office tasks, like inventory turns. The chief information officer for Fikes Wholesale views AI through an operational lens first, then wants to figure out how it can support frontline employees. "We always talk about: Let's do everything we can to make their lives easier," he said.

Brockway believes AI could help employee-customer connections both by showing existing employees what they could do better and also by helping onboard new employees with customer engagement tactics.

Direct, focused tasks are what Sorin Hilgen, group CDO and in-country chief information officer for EG Group, would like to gain from AI applications. He wonders if the hype around AI equates to measurable outcomes. "We have to weather a little bit of the hype around AI right now because there's a lot of hype and there's a lot of misunderstanding what it actually can do," he said. How to apply AI

CTVG
CONVENIENCE TECHNOLOGY
VISION GROUP

CTVG members were quick to frame AI technology as a new, advanced tool but also simultaneously consider where high-tech in general may not be necessary.

while remaining deeply connected to customers is a perplexing issue.

Donnie Rhoads, director of business development for The Convenience Group, echoed that thought. “It’s a deeply personal thing when a customer comes in and chooses to spend time in our stores and shop our stores,” he said. “But when I think about the notions of artificial intelligence or a lot of the really grand technological innovations, there’s something impersonal about that and that’s a bridge that we’re going to need to cross.” For him, it’s about technology that can remove friction without alienating customers. “Maybe that doesn’t mean getting them in and out of the store as fast as possible, but it does mean making their lives easier in the process.”

Understanding how to leverage technology remains a clear goal for all CTVG members. As it relates to frontline employees, Robert Hampton, VP technology services & innovation for Jacksons Food Stores, wonders if AI can sort through mounds of information to discern the most critical things, such as distilling information down to three exact things that an employee should do at that moment in the store. For example, cleaning up a spill that happened out of the employee’s line of sight, or sending the manager over to the food prep area because an employee isn’t wearing gloves.

CTVG members were quick to frame AI technology as a new, advanced tool but also simultaneously consider where high-tech in general may not be necessary. While smart technology makes headlines, “there’s still a lot of application for dumb technology,” said Roy Strasburger, CEO of StrasGlobal and president of Compliance Safe. He noted the most basic tech can still make life easier and more efficient and eliminate mundane work.

Simply put: Dumb technology has a place in today’s world. “Sometimes I think we get into a world where we seriously overthink a situation,” said Nick Peters, vice president, IT, at Campbell Oil Company.

“Dumb technology” was a phrase lauded by several CTVG members. There are a few dumb-technology devices establishing a niche with consumers. These devices enable users to select how advanced they want their technology, allowing the user to fluctuate between high-tech and low-tech interactions. For instance, someone may opt to take a dumb version of their smartphone on vacation, one that enables calls and texts but eliminates the option of viewing emails.

Tech as it Relates to Shift Flexibility

One very functional application of technology comes by way of the gig economy as retailers in all segments seek to add schedule flexibility in an attempt to combat labor shortages. Circle K taps the gig economy with an app where workers sign in for shifts, said Janeth Falcon, VP North America technology for Circle K.

"It's worked well for us because the reality is we are facing challenges with labor, and this gives us an additional group of workers that can work the different shifts for us and even segment it by tasks," Falcon said. The app Circle K uses can even cite the skills needed to perform specific tasks. In addition to filling labor holes, she adds the app has also allowed greater store-level staffing flexibility.

Circle K's dedication to figuring out tech platforms includes **investing in startups** that concentrate on emerging technologies. Investments focus on operational efficiency and the digital customer experience and include companies that use AI to gather in-store data, an app connected to state lotteries, and delivery-based entities.

AI Focus:

Practical applications

Technology — particularly smartphone apps — have become so intuitive, it has upped the ante for nearly every tech interaction people have. Hampton compared this to the way he can choose players in fantasy football and how that model could someday work at the store level. "I'm thinking of our frontline employees, why can't I just swap shifts with somebody because my kid has a thing to do or whatever, and why can't I just drag and drop the shifts on the schedule just like I can my lineup in fantasy football?"

Younger generations have grown up with this type of technology, Hampton pointed out, adding that employers need to cater to them and meet them where they are at. "A lot of the new generation of workers, they just want to work so many shifts a week and they want to pick and choose, and maybe one week it's Circle K and the next week it's McDonald's and Walmart or somewhere else. So, a lot of things to think about, but really focus on how technology and how consumers are using technology and how that impacts the way we need to think about it within our stores and in the presentation to the customer."

Technology — particularly smartphone apps — have become so intuitive, it has upped the ante for nearly every tech interaction people have.

CONVENIENCE TECHNOLOGY VISION GROUP

Two Tech-Related Labor Goals:

Increase available employee pool

Add scheduling flexibility

Sheetz started tapping the gig economy as a new way to accomplish task work. Unloading deliveries is one example Joe Sheetz, chairman of the board for Sheetz, ***shared during the January 26, 2023, Convenience Leaders Vision Group meeting.*** CLVG is another collaborative group under the Vision Group Network umbrella. Sheetz believes the gig economy will continue to evolve in the industry.

Eva Strasburger, president of StrasGlobal and CEO of Compliance Safe, referenced gamification as another related topic brought up in that same CLVG meeting. Anne Gauthier, co-CEO and chief financial officer for St. Romain Oil Company, suggested a gamification app where employees could earn points to choose the best shifts would be interesting, and she asked if anyone knew if one exists.

During the CTVG meeting, Mike Templeton, director of digital guest experience, Casey's, mentioned that McDonald's might have some kind of approach that allocates points for employee training. He finds the idea of turning earned points for training into some kind of currency that can improve the actual employee experience interesting. **McDonald's is known for making great strides in the push into digital** in all areas.

The growing interest in the gig economy and technology spans many segments that share some element of foodservice as a business model. Indeed, it was the genesis for **Curbivore**, a next-gen kind of conference held March 8 in Los Angeles. The event served as a way to bring tech startups, restaurateurs and anyone interested in advancing food-oriented mobility together.

The growing interest in the gig economy and technology spans many segments that share some element of foodservice as a business model.

The Breaking Point on Data Collection

Volatility in consumer behavior, in regard to how much personal information consumers are willing to share, has CTVG members questioning what the right amount of data is to collect in the quest for personalizing the shopping experience.

Providing a phone number was once the breaking point for many consumers, said Steve Morris, owner/president of Retail Management Inc. While working on the loyalty program under the Super America brand, which included a million members at the time, phone numbers were the one thing consumers did not want to share, he said.

Today, submitting a mobile phone number is commonplace, even a requirement for enrollment in many loyalty programs, including the one at Toot'n Totum Food Stores, said Rance Wells, vice president of IT for the chain. He added that while the program requires a cell phone number, he can also see how ominous over-collecting information could become in the predictive realm.

The fewer data points collected in order for a company to make a purchasing recommendation, the better, right? Following that general principle would avoid collecting too much data, Templeton belives. How far is too far? He wonders. For example, assume 10 data fields are necessary for a consumer to sign up for a loyalty program. "We don't need all 10 of those things to identify somebody and track what's happening with purchases," he said.

For younger people opting into a loyalty app today, apps have bled further into personal data requests than ever before. And, perhaps surprisingly, most younger generations seem to have a high level of comfort with fulfilling those requests and giving away personal information if they understand the benefits coming, said Rhoads.

"There's a lot of unknowns as to how far this could really go until a regulatory agency decides to step in," Rhoads said. "Or there are people out in the streets screaming 'Give me my phone number back' or something. But we haven't gotten there yet."

Rhoads anticipates a pushback in the U.S. when it comes to what companies are allowed to collect as corporations and consumers alike navigate the thin line between data collection and curated personalized experiences.

At some point it also becomes an ethical decision, Brockway pointed out, particularly when using a video intelligence tool versus data the customer willingly shares. He thinks there will be a larger question around how far is too far if marketing evolves to the point of being able to personalize messaging to customers based on data collected through video technology. It becomes an ethical consideration as well, he said, one that he believes will become a bigger question companies will need to address.

The **GDPR** (the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation) outlines a strict data privacy law, one that Circle K is compliant with across the globe, said Falcon. Any Circle K

product that will scale from the U.S. to Europe has to support the regulatory requirements for those different countries, she noted. "It makes it a little bit more complicated for us to roll out global solutions," she added.

While acknowledging **the impact of GDPR**, Hilgen added that it's also now important to understand local data rules on top of GDPR. In Germany, for example, data cannot leave German territory, even if it's in the cloud. **In the U.S., data privacy laws** are moving forward on a state by state basis. Keeping pace with each state's variances makes compliance efforts challenging.

From a European perspective, Hilgen feels consumers in those countries "really think a lot more about what data they give and how comfortable they are with giving up that information." In contrast, his view of many U.S. consumers is "Yeah, sure, whatever, I don't care, here you go." He does not see nearly as strong of a movement around privacy laws in the U.S.

One step removed from collecting information directly from consumers is how targeted technology can become from a marketing perspective. **Disney's approach to its advertising platform offers** an understanding of the potential of hyper-curated marketing. The media giant continues to perfect its advertising strategy on its streaming platforms. The company pays meticulous attention to the nuances available with the **consumer data Disney collects.** For example, ads can vary not only between viewers accessing the same content from Disney+ and ESPN but also differ between individuals watching from the same app. The parameters available to advertisers are based on **data collected from viewers**. Disney does fully disclose its **privacy policy**.

Unresolved Data Question:

How much to collect?

Keeping pace with each state's variances makes compliance efforts challenging.

CTVG
CONVENIENCE TECHNOLOGY
VISION GROUP



Tech Side Views

Filtering Tech Down

How does tech filter down to small retailers? That's a question Morris ponders as he looks for the Venn diagram overlap of affordability and ROI when it comes to technology. "How, and when, do we make technology easily adaptable, easily affordable for what continues to be the vast majority of [convenience stores]?" he asks.

Effective Dashboarding

Right now, most convenience stores have multiple dashboards for the various smart devices in stores. One dashboard that culls it all together is on the wish list for Raymond Huff, president of HJB Convenience Corp—and other members agreed.

In a related comment, Rhoads said that the older architecture of technology in stores makes it an interesting field to navigate. A store can easily have four different software companies that do four different things in a store. It's a lot of moving pieces. A unified platform would be a game changer, he said.

A recent **McKinsey & Company report** outlines the myriad challenges and opportunities around "replatforming."

Additionally, fourth-generation operator Erin Graziosi, president of Robinson Oil Corp., relates to the challenge many c-store operators face in overseeing a slew of different components of the business. She's interested in exploring the potential of apps that could connect everything.

ChatGPT in Action

Scott Smith, senior director of IT at Parker's Kitchen, used **ChatGPT** to draft a speech and declared the result one of the most thoughtfully written pieces about an employee he has ever read. While he added his own personal touches to it, the exercise proved to him that ChatGPT technology assists in some functions. He's curious to see how it can further enable the customer experience.

Leaning into Tech

As mergers and acquisitions continue throughout the industry, the technology teams that support stores may lean heavily into more sophisticated solutions that help them manage it all. For example, all stores under Director of Retail Technology Kenneth England's territory were once within roughly an hour's drive time. Majors Management's acquisitions have greatly expanded that range and he's now supporting stores from Maine to Michigan to Arizona to Florida.

Legacy Technology

One of the challenges with advancing technology in convenience/petroleum marketing is that to be more agile, all systems will need to talk to each other better than they do today. Legacy systems tied to oil brands add to the complexity, noted Hampton, who suggested there is a struggle in the forecourt when it comes to tying tech together. Will new technology around EV charging change the paradigm?

Hyper-Focused Digital

What to do with the gobs of data being collected? Hilgen would like an answer to that quandary. While he believes EG Group has been efficient

with the data being collected, he also concedes that the company may fall slightly short in amassing the capabilities to really drive insights out of the data at a truly impactful speed to the business. He anticipates AI and machine learning will one day help leverage data and move the company closer to more powerful consumer insights and, ultimately, hyper-focused shopping experiences. He pointed out that it might be easier to get more hyper-focused first on the digital side of retail — such as online ordering — then expand those learnings across the non-digital world of brick-and-mortar retail.

Tech & the C-Suite

With the explosion of technology comes the need for a greater awareness of how to navigate and grow a business in this ever-expanding digital world. A C-suite that embraces and understands IT may prove an advantage. At Spinx Company, execs can tap Executive Vice President of Human Resources Cheryl Szczesniak, who brings a wealth of IT knowledge to the table in her former role of chief information officer.

EV Tech

Can the technology coming ahead with EV advances move the mobility industry forward with technology overall? CTVG members are interested in learning more about EV and how related applications may impact their world.

The Intelligent Shopper

Gen Z and Millennials are getting sophisticated at using data from sources like social media to learn about retailers and what's behind the curtain so to speak. Therefore, now, more than ever, retailers need to keep up with consumers and pay attention to branding and phygital (digital + physical) exposure to meet them on their terms, said Eva Strasburger. She expressed concern that operators might one day fall behind and wake up to find out that their customers have outgrown them. "Today's consumer is a much more intelligent consumer and typically knows more about the retailer than the retailer knows about them" she said. "They are actually using the data in a very intelligent way to decide — do they want to shop at this store?"

A Rising Tide Lifts all Boats

There is a need to share challenges and advances across the industry, including with small operators, said Myra Kressner, president of Kressner Strategy Group. Frank and diverse discussions using the knowledge base of experience and innovative ideas helps all retailers experiencing the current challenges, she said. These discussions also highlight opportunities for solution providers in terms of what they can solve for operators.

CTVG
CONVENIENCE TECHNOLOGY
VISION GROUP

CONVENIENCE TECHNOLOGY VISION GROUP

MEMBERS

Lorne Brockway
Chief Information Officer, Fikes Wholesale Inc.

Jason Collins
Director of IT, Englefield Oil

Ed Collupy
CTVG Advisor/Facilitator and Principal, Collupy Systems Solutions LLC

Kenneth England
Director Retail Technology, Majors Management

Janeth Falcon
VP North America Technology, Circle K

Erin Graziosi
President, Robinson Oil Corp.

Robert Hampton
VP Technology Services & Innovation, Jacksons Food Stores

Sorin Hilgen
Group CDO/In-Country Chief Information Officer, EG Group

Raymond Huff
President, HJB Convenience Corp.

Myra Kressner*
President, Kressner Strategy Group

Steve Morris
Owner/President, Retail Management Inc.

Nick Peters
Vice President, IT, Campbell Oil Company

Skip Potter
Director of Technology, Maplefields

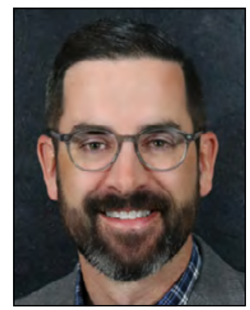
Donnie Rhoads
Director of Business Development, The Convenience Group LLC

Scott Smith
Senior Director of IT, Parker's Kitchen

Eva Strasburger*
President, StrasGlobal and CEO, Compliance Safe

Roy Strasburger*
CEO, StrasGlobal and President, Compliance Safe

Cheryl Szczesniak
Executive Vice President of Human Resources, Spinx Company



Mike Templeton
Director of Digital Guest Experience, Casey's

Rance Wells
Vice President of IT, Toot'n Totum Food Stores LLC

**Founding Member*

CTVG Views
In The Room with CTVG

IN THE ROOM WITH CTVG: *Tech Trailblazing*

Convenience Technology Vision Group (CTVG) invites you to join us **In The Room** to experience our meeting on March 3, 2023. We are providing you with the entire conversation so that you can be "in the room" with us, rather than simply reading polished sound bites.

CTVG
CONVENIENCE TECHNOLOGY
VISION GROUP

Agenda

15 Topic Reference Key

16 Welcome and Meeting Rules

18 The Introductions

29 The Presentation: Ed Talk

33 The Discussion

49 Closing Thoughts

CONVENIENCE TECHNOLOGY VISION GROUP

Topic Reference Key

CTVG's mission is to increase the institutional knowledge of the retail industry by sharing ideas and perspectives. For your convenience, we have placed topic indicators throughout the dialogue. Below is a key to the list of topics.

- Channel Blurring
- Fuels
  - Electric Vehicles
  - Unbranded Fuel
- Operations
  - Inventory Control
- Marketing
  - Consumer Exp.
  - Data
  - Data Analysis
  - Loyalty Programs
- Technology
  - AI
  - Barcodes
  - Checkout
  - Connectivity
  - Dumb Technology
  - Frictionless
  - Legacy Technology
- Workforce
  - Gamification
  - Labor
  - Loyalty Programs

CTVG
CONVENIENCE TECHNOLOGY
VISION GROUP

Welcome and Meeting Rules

Myra Kressner

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Myra Kressner and on behalf of Vision Group Network co-founders Eva Strasburger, Roy Strasburger, and myself and Ed Collupy, who will be leading our discussions, welcome to the first meeting of Convenience Technology Vision Group. The Vision Group Network brings virtual groups like this from all parts of the retail and foodservice industries together to create a knowledge base of experience and innovative ideas. The mixture of perspectives, real world experiences and collaboration during our Vision Group Network meetings provides valuable insights and actionable programs that allow you, its members, to maximize your business opportunities. The Vision Group Network's mission is to be an open information resource motivated by the premise that "a rising tide lifts all boats."

Eva, Roy and I have each been in the convenience retailing industry for over 40 years.

Roy and Eva, owners of StrasGlobal, are well known for their thought leadership and for owning and running c-stores in the U.S., Asia, Europe, Australia and South America.

I am privileged to have co-founded and managed CSP, one of the industry's leading media and communication companies. Since selling CSP to Winsight Media 10 years ago, Kressner Strategy Group has been facilitating knowledge sharing among retailers and suppliers.

Eva, Roy and I created The Vision Group (TVG), early during COVID in 2020 to anticipate industry disruptions and share strategies with members. In order to delve more deeply into the common issues facing retailers, The Vision Group was followed by Convenience Leaders Vision Group (CLVG) and now Convenience Technology Vision Group (CTVG). Several additional vision groups are also in development.

Ideas and perspectives from Vision Group Network meetings are available to everyone through a series of Vision Reports intended to help retailers, suppliers, and industry affiliates understand current challenges, solutions, and opportunities, regardless of the size of their business. Each Vision Report is comprised of two parts. Part one is Views, which provides an overview of each meeting with additional research for extra context. And in part two, In The Room provides the entire dialogue in transcript format. So, thanks to all of you for making this commitment to learn and share.

This screenshot reminds every one of the antitrust statement and publication acknowledgement that every member has signed [screen shows antitrust statement and publication acknowledgement]. And we are recording this discussion.

Keep in mind that this is not a webinar, which often does call for anonymity, and questions are fielded by a moderator. Instead, we want all of you to actively participate. So please use your camera and keep it on as much as possible. Conversely, please keep your audio on mute unless you're speaking so we're not bothered by ambient noise.

And since we do want frank and diverse discussion, if anyone does want to make an off the record comment, just let us know what you're about to say, or have said, is off the record. For the sake of respectful conversation flow, please use the raise hand icon or raise your hand as often as possible unless, clearly, two or three members are in a back-and-forth discussion. We will do our best to recognize everyone, in order, who wants to comment, ask a question or answer a question, so that the conversation flows well and everyone who wants to speak is respected. And lastly, if you need to leave the meeting for any reason, you can either write a short note in chat or just leave and return when you're able. So now it is my real pleasure to turn this meeting over to Ed Collupy.

NEXT: The Introductions

The Introductions

Ed Collupy

Well, thank you so much, Myra. You've given us some tall marching orders there, which I appreciate, and we'll get through it all together.

The Convenience Tech Vision Group is very exciting.

A big shoutout to Myra and Eva and Roy for bringing this fabulous group together. Without their vision to establish The Vision Group we wouldn't be here today. So, thank you to the three of you for doing that and inviting me to participate along with you. And it's great to be with the members of the group, many of you who I've known for a number of years, some of you who I am meeting for the first time today. And I really look forward to getting to know everyone a lot better through our discussions with these virtual meetings over the next year or two.

We're going to start off with an introduction and go around the room on our first meeting to really get a sense of who we are and get an opportunity to know a little bit about each other from a professional standpoint, a little bit about your company, as well as a little bit about your personal self.

I'll kick it off. And on the personal side — just a little twist — a bit of an icebreaker so we get a sense of who we really are; would you reach for something that's nearby you and use that object or whatever it is you found to tell a story about your personal side. It's always fun to have that little bit of extra element to add to the conversation.

So, like our hosts and Vision Group leaders, I've been in retailing for over 40 years and every minute of it, from the start as a bag boy in a local supermarket to just the other day when I was on a webinar with some really young and smart technology leaders, it's been a fascinating ride for me.

I like to say that I'm rewired not retired, especially after those 40 years. Most recently I've spent the last eight years engaging with all types of clients through my work with W. Capra Consulting Group, along with other firms, including my own. That came after almost 20 years in IT leadership roles at The Pantry convenience store chain. I joined them [The Pantry] after my bag boy experience, which led to an over 20-year career with a regional supermarket chain here in the Boston area. And after The Pantry was sold to Couche-Tard, my wife and I headed back to Massachusetts. Just before we headed out, we visited Asheville, North Carolina, and realizing that we were going to be living on Cape Cod, I took the opportunity to learn more about glass blowing and glass making and made my first glass piece — this blob [holds up a glass object], supposedly a paperweight. Because you see, Sandwich, the town that we moved to, was founded many, many years ago by glass makers. And today the town remains committed to that industry. I sit on the Sandwich Glass Museum's board of trustees as one of the many volunteer things that I do in my "rewirement." So that's a little bit about me. Let's go around the room. We're going to do it in order by first name. So Cheryl, you get to go first.

Cheryl Szczesniak

Thank you. I work for Spinx Company, headquartered in Greenville, South Carolina. We have 85 stores and about 1600 teammates. I'm currently the EVP of HR. I moved over to HR in 2015. And prior to HR, I was CIO, which is how I guess I got into this illustrious group. So, thanks, Ed. Prior to that when I came down to Spinx in 2005, when they recruited me from Wawa, I was a controller. So, I've worn many hats: accounting, IT and now EVP of HR. I have a master's in HR and a bachelor's in accounting.

My husband and I live in Greenville. I've got five children and 12 grandchildren. And so, for my little funny thing, I will hold up this [holds up a a Snoop Dogg action figure] — everybody see him? Everybody know who he is? I see some smiling faces. So hey, Donnie, put that down [Donnie holds up a figurine too. Laughter from the group]. So little known fact. And when people find this out about me, they're like, are you kidding me? I love rap. So I'm in HR, Friday is my rap day. So I put on my rap music every Friday and I listen to it and only turn it down when Stuart or Steve come in the room [laughter]. So that's me. Thanks, Ed.

Ed Collupy

Thanks Cheryl. That's fantastic. And you're in the group not because you're not in IT anymore, you're in the group because you're in HR and you had that accounting experience. We want to hear from all the groups throughout the industry as it relates to technology. So your voice will be important. Donnie, why don't you go next?

Donnie Rhoads

Sure. Thanks, Cheryl for showing me Snoop Dogg, right? Because I have mine here too, sitting just behind the monitor.

I'm Donnie Rhodes. I work for The Convenience Group with my dad, Don Rhoads. I'm sure some of you have met him. I have been working for the company for a long time, but in terms of a W-2, officially on the books standpoint in my actual post-college career, it's been about three years now with the company. I'm the director of business development, but for my responsibilities it's a wide net that I cast. Our office has about six people in it. We have eight stores in Southwest Washington. I'm in Vancouver right now, for those of you who know about the American Vancouver.

Personal thing about me — I have this oyster shell here [holds up an oyster shell] and I don't normally have the habit of keeping empty oyster shells on my desk, but back in October, I went up to Bellingham, Washington, and I proposed to my now fiancé by putting the ring in an oyster shell and opening it. And it was a little cheesy, but we had a lot of fun and we love seafood and that was a big moment for me and for us back in the fall. I'm going to preserve it and put some kind of sealant or something like that, but it's been sitting on my desk for months. So that's my introduction. Thank you.

Ed Collupy Excellent. There's nothing better than a great oyster and congratulations on your engagement, Donnie. Thank you. And you should come visit Cape Cod. We have great oystering here and opportunities to get out there and oyster.

Donnie Rhoads You're welcome. Thanks. It's on my list for sure.

Ed Collupy Excellent. Erin, you're next in line alphabetically.

Erin Graziosi Erin Graziosi. We have Robinson Oil. We have Rotten Robbie gas stations, all in Northern California. We're a fourth-generation family-owned company. I am part of the fourth generation along with my sister, who also is here who runs our merchandising and marketing side. We have 36 locations, we run fuel trucks and we deal with the joy that is California on so many levels. I guess as far as a personal item, if you guys can see it behind me [points at framed kids' drawings on the wall], those are, they would probably call them masterpieces, by my three children. They are nine and a half, eight and six and a half. Boy, girl, boy. A random fact is, I'm one of three siblings, we're a sister, brother, sister, we all have three kids. None of us had genders in the same order. Out of the nine grandchildren, we all go every other boy-girl-boy or girl-boy-girl and every single grandchild and every one of us, were all born via C-section too. So super random how that all works out, but there seems to be a trend in our family. So that's us in a nutshell.

Ed Collupy Excellent. And as someone once told me, Erin, there's no such thing as coincidences, so there's a reason [laugh]. Very good. Appreciate it. Hopefully you've survived the storms.

Erin Graziosi We have. There's a lot going on though, for sure, between rain and snow and all and everything in between.

Ed Collupy Right? Yeah. Wow. Janeth, welcome.

Janeth Falcon Thank you. I'm Janeth Falcon, so the H is silent, so this is "Janet" [laugh], just for information. I'm the vice president of North America technology for Circle K. I've been with Circle K for about three months. I look after 10,000 retail stores across the U.S. and Canada. Prior to that I worked for Parkland in Calgary helping their executive team with finance transformation program. And before that I spent six years in Switzerland working for a couple of companies — Trafigura, they're a trading commodities firm, and Puma Energy. Puma has 3,500 stores in 35 countries in Africa, Asia Pacific and Central America. And then, before that, I spent a long time with BP and Amoco, where I met Ed during my BP days. I've been in the industry a long time. My husband's also in the industry, so I think some of you know him, like Scott Smith [laugh], my husband's Steve O'Toole. We have three boys of 18, 21, 25. And the object near me is a little baseball [holds up baseball]. All the kids do sports. So we go to football games, hockey games, baseball games and that's what we like to do — go to sporting events.

Ed Collupy Fantastic. And I wonder, Janeth, I never really asked you how many languages have you been able to pick up?

Janeth Falcon I'm fluent in Spanish and English and then I picked up a little bit of French, not that I could read it, but in Switzerland we lived in Geneva and it's a French-speaking town. You had to learn at least to do conversational French to get around.

Ed Collupy Yeah. Excellent. Well thank you. Next in order would've been Jason Collins, who is a CTVG member. But Jason had a personal commitment already planned for well in advance of today's date. He's traveling from Ohio where his company is Englefield Oil which runs 119 Duchess stores in Ohio and West Virginia. He's traveling to Maine today, so with that we're going to move on to Ken England.

Kenneth England Good to see everybody again. Lots of people I've known for several years on this call today. I have been in this industry for 26 years. All of my time has been in the state of Georgia, though, not nearly as wide ranging as some others. I'm currently with Majors Management. We are a company based just outside of Atlanta. My role here is director of retail technology, supporting a growing group of locations that we are picking up through various acquisitions. I'm used to supporting stores in a geographical area that I can get to within an hour or so of driving. Now I'm supporting stores from Maine to Michigan to Arizona to Florida, little bit here and there. And we are now at 57 Coco locations.

One fact about me, we have a grandchild who will be turning one next Tuesday, having a birthday party for him tomorrow. And grandchild number two, which will be in Colorado, we're expecting middle of June this year. And my thing I have around me for those who are football fans [hold us a cup with logo of Georgia Bulldogs]. This is back-to-back, Georgia's two national championships. That is my cup of choice around the office now.

Ed Collupy Very good, thanks Ken. Appreciate the insights. And I remember your one-hour travels. You can't get to Maine in one hour from Georgia.

Kenneth England No, I can't.

Ed Collupy Lorne?

Lorne Brockway Good afternoon everybody. I'm Lorne Brockway. I'm with the Fikes Companies, owners of CEFCO convenience stores. Got about 178 convenience stores. Run about 35 QSRs. I've been in retail forever, pretty much my entire life. But I spent about 20 years in brick and mortar, and then I spent about 15 years doing some e-commerce stuff and distribution. That was a lot of fun. Big change of worlds there from those two. And then I've been in the convenience industry for about 10 years now with Fikes. Again, we've got our convenience stores, we've got the trucking company, we've got a terminal. Something that's unique about us is we also have an ATM company, CORD Financial Services. And then we also have Digital Network Solutions, which is actually an ATM processing company. So, we process millions of transactions through that — keeps us pretty busy.

My personal item is a rock [holds up rock], if you can see that — from one of my favorite places in North Conway, New Hampshire — the White Mountains. I've moved around quite a bit and when I was up in Massachusetts my daughter and I would always go camping up there. And I picked that up on one of our trips and have a date on it from 2008. That's it. And I have seven grandkids.

Ed Collupy Fantastic. North Conway used to be one of my second-home places. I don't know whether we've ever shared that. And you have a great personal business. Sometime if we ever come together in person as a group, I think we need to visit Lorne.

Lorne Brockway Yeah, I own a brewery too. Been a home brewer for a long time. So, we started a brewery last year.

Ed Collupy Fantastic. Thanks Lorne. Mike, I haven't had a chance to meet you and you threw up a question in the chat asking what does Sandwich have to do with the glass makers? That's a great question. I am not sure how they got the name. Sandwich is a British town a couple of hours outside of London that I actually visited since I've moved here. It was just before COVID and it was a fantastic little town. So, we're named after that town in the U.K. but I'm not sure why they picked Sandwich over some other name. But thanks, and it's great to have you on board.

Mike Templeton Glass Town, right? Mike Templeton, I am director of digital experience at Casey's. I've been here for about four and a half years. I spent eight years at another little convenience store chain across town. You can look that up if you like. What else am I talking about? The digital experience. I mean here I started several years ago, started up digital marketing, built a new mobile app, re-platformed commerce, launched the loyalty platform that went live in January 2020, just a few short months before lots of other things happened in the world. It's been a wild ride. It's been a ton of fun. I'm from Iowa, so this is a brand I've grown up with all my life, drove past it for many years thinking, 'Man, that'd be nice to go work at a place like that.' And here I am. I was thinking I have a lot of little things back behind me, but the thing I'll point out is I got a poster here of Heinz Field behind me [points to poster].

Not because I lived in Pittsburgh or grew up there or have any specific connection except that I was watching the Penguins against the Red Wings in 2008 in the Stanley Cup Finals. I thought, Penguins, those guys have a cool logo, I'm going to cheer for these guys. And then they ended up winning the Cup that year. And as I made my way into the working world, I quickly found I needed to have an NFL team to cheer for after not following the NFL at all growing up. So, I said, hey, the Penguins, they have a football team, it's the same colors, go Steelers. I've been a fan now for a number of years and I got a chance to take my son to a Monday night game there at Heinz Field about a year ago. It was an amazing experience. It's not often, you get people who are Steelers fans in the middle of Iowa.

Ed Collupy Very good. We all have a team somewhere around. So great to hear yours is in Pittsburgh. Hey, my former neighbor down in North Carolina is up next. Nick.

Nick Peters Hey, how's everybody doing today? First of all, Lorne, is your beer any good?

Lorne Brockway It's actually very good and I would encourage you to come and dispute that with me.

Nick Peters I like where your head's at. OK, so another thing too, Mike, I'm sorry you're a Steelers fan, but I respect that and I'm just going to have to get over that. Let's see here. All right, so I've been in the industry for over 20 years and kind of what Ken said, because I was looking at Ken when he made the comment, I recognize a lot of faces on the call. It's good to see some old friends again. I really enjoy scenarios like this because you have a great meeting of the minds and it's good to have a good conversation around some things. Again, been in this company or been in the industry 20 years. I currently work for Campbell Oil Company. Campbell Oil Company is out of Elizabethtown, North Carolina, which is a small town in North Carolina. We are 62 convenience stores which are Minuteman branded. And the cool thing about Campbell Oil Company is we also have a huge wholesale division and we also have a significant lubricants division.

We have approximately 40 short trucks in our fleet. Supporting those is always a fun experience. And when people ask me what I do for a living, I tell them I'm a janitor because I clean up messes and I think that if I retire from IT, I'm going to retire and become an LCR meter technician and I'm just going to work on lube meter trucks and short fuel trucks because I have had my fair share taste of that recently.

For a personal item, I'm just going to show this real quick here [holds up a yellow smiley face figure]. I don't know if anybody can see it with the whole mirroring going on. It's not necessarily a personal story, but it is a significant one because it represents the industry and was given to me by a CSR [customer service representative] at a convenience store.

And the reason why they gave it to me was because I drove two and a half hours to bring them their check because there was a situation where an employee made a mistake and messed up their direct deposit, so I drove it down to her. And she looked at me and she says, 'I have nothing to give you, but I have this to give you.' It just says something to the effect of 'Thank you for being awesome.' So, I kind of keep it on my desk because it's a good reminder of why I do this.

Ed Collupy Fantastic. That is a great story and thanks for thinking of the people that are on the frontline. Sometimes we forget that that's the most important part of the job.

Nick Peters Agree completely.

Ed Collupy Rance.

Rance Wells Hello everyone. Rance Wells, Toot'n Totum Food Stores based in Amarillo, Texas. We serve Texas, New Mexico, Kansas and Oklahoma. We have a lot of stores in the Texas panhandle. Been in this role as the vice president of IT for less than a year and the IT director for almost 10 years. Don't feel any different in this job. Basically, the same job. Before that I was an IT technician and then came from the frontlines working in the stores. Over 20 years altogether in the industry. All with Toot'n Totum — kind of came up organically. If you see my background here [turns to look at his background to reference], while we were beginning this meeting, we got AI to generate an energy recharge station and biological disposal unit in the future of the year 2050. And that's what AI generated. So, I don't know where the convenience store is in this mock-up, but who knows. But yeah, excited to be part of this.

A lot of familiar faces, I know a lot of you guys. Ed asked me to join, and I said, OK.

Anyway, this is my item [holds up Superman image coffee cup]. My wife and I bought a pottery studio a year ago February 6th. We ran it for one year and we sold it on February 7th, 2023. And this is a memento from that. My wife and my five-year-old-son made this. It's a coffee cup that has been turned into a pen holder with, I guess, dad as a superhero. So anyway, there's that. A little bit about me. I enjoy hunting, fishing, camping, gardening. We have a golden retriever — she's a field-bred golden retriever that we take hunting — and love attending church with my friends and family. Happy to be here. Happy to contribute. Thank you.

Ed Collupy Thanks Rance. I love your AI-generated background. I'm glad you were able to find it and share that with us. Raymond, who I've gotten to know from the original Vision Group, go ahead, Ray.

Raymond Huff So quick things about me. I operate a chain of stores called Russell's Convenience. It was a really, really good chain of stores prior to COVID, and I'm just trying to figure out what it looks like afterward. And I share that because our stores are specifically located in high-rise office buildings. So, if you think of the downtown, we're on the first floor, we're like an airport store in an office building. Well, guess what? Nobody's coming back to the office. So it's been sort of a disaster from that standpoint. But because we were in that environment, we had to create our own technology to keep up with what our customers were asking. And so, I ended up creating a company called Tenderfoot Software that basically does all the tech inside of our stores, and that's now being purchased — well for a while it's being purchased — by other companies.

So that piece of it is growing. I'm on a lot of boards, I'm on a lot of things, been around a long time so to speak. And I'm really opinionated on where technology's going, but I'm forward-thinking and I'm forward-thinking mainly because of the customer that we have. Our customer is very educated; some of them are young, some of them are old, but they're very educated — doctors, lawyers, kids coming in from college, et cetera. So, we have our stores in an office environment and they make certain demands of us in our store. Why don't you have this? Why isn't this working? This thing called Apple Pay — 10 years ago whenever they did that, it was not anything I knew about, but they demanded it. So we had to figure out how to make that piece work. And the technology side of the company did that. Today we operate eight stores, that's down from 24 pre-COVID.

And a personal thing, I couldn't decide between the two, but I thought I should share this — this is a picture of me and my wife [holds up photo]. We started traveling together in 1997 and we have hit 65 unique places in the world. So that's a personal thing. And we have I think 10,000 more to go. I mean it's sort of interesting, we go to Mexico regularly, but Mexico's a big country like the United States. In the United States, we haven't done the United States. So there's a lot of travel to do. The other thing that I'd like to show you as a personal thing is horses [holds up a standing horse figure]. My mom really loved horses. She passed in 2016 and I had no idea how big of collection she had in horses. So, whenever we travel, if it's offered, we do horseback riding. That's how we got to the horse piece. So, I think I know a lot of you guys out there and if I don't, I'm going to sure see you as I go to all these conferences this year, et cetera. So, thanks for even allowing me to be a part of the group.

Ed Collupy Scott, you're up next.

Scott Smith

Awesome. Well, I'm actually celebrating my second anniversary at Parker's located in Savannah, Georgia. I previously was at a company in the Northeast called Royal Farms. Fun fact would be that Cheryl actually visited me when I first started as an intern and I said, 'Wow, I want to be like her.' She's wicked, smart, and she was taking Spinx to the next level in IT. So Cheryl, thank you. I don't think I'll be joining HR, but I'll try to stick in IT.

One cool thing around my desk was a golf ball [holds up golf ball]. Starting in convenience and growing up in this business, I used to spend all my time working and helping the stores. But moving down to the South where I can play golf pretty much year-round. I've started doing that. So, we have a Friday golf team here at the office and we're going to be going out later today at 6:00. It's good to see all of you guys.

Ed Collupy

Very good. I'm sorry Scott, I let you jump ahead of Robert, so my bad Robert.

Robert Hampton

No worries. Good afternoon, everyone. Robert Hampton. I work for Jacksons Food Stores, and I've been in the industry total about 11 years. I was with Texaco previously, I like to say like 100 years ago, but it was back in the '90s. Then I did some other stuff and then Jacksons came calling and I've been with them about eight years; for five I was the CIO and now I am the vice president of technology services and innovation. A little bit about Jacksons: We've got over 300 stores. We're branded Shell and Chevron. We're vertically integrated. We have our own grocery distribution as well as our own fuel distribution that serves about a total of 1,200 non-Jacksons locations.

Let's see. One thing I'd like to show here, kind of like Donnie mentioned up in the Northwest, I have this picture [holds up photo]. I like to travel like a few of you. I don't know if you can see this, but this picture here I keep on my desk, it's me 20, 30 years ago enjoying a rather large margarita in Victoria, Canada. And like Raymond mentioned, I like to travel. I just returned on Wednesday from Mexico, my first time to Mexico, so I had a good time there and look forward to working with everyone. I know many of you. I know Rance, I went to school at Texas Tech in Lubbock, I've seen a lot of his stores in Amarillo, and Scott I've known for a while, and of course Ed and many others. Looking forward to working with everyone.

Ed Collupy

Robert, I'm glad I haven't lost touch with you because of your movement in your company and those types of things. So great to have you in The Vision Group. Thank you. Next, after Scott would have been Skip Potter. Skip is the director of IT at R.L. Vallee up in Vermont. They run a number of convenience stores, 45 convenience stores in Vermont, New Hampshire, New York — Maplefield's is the name of their stores. Skip will be joining us as we go forward here as well. Next up my neighbor here in the greater Boston area, Sorin.

Sorin Hilgen Hi everyone, great to be here. Sorin Hilgen. I'm with EG. I'm the group chief digital officer and U.S. CIO. I've been in retail for about 15 or 16 years with Gulf Oil, Cumberland Farms, and now EG. Prior to that, I was in the commodity trading space. So transitioning from commodity trading into retail was a big, big change. But I certainly got the retail bug and loved it ever since.

As you see behind me, let me bring it closer [shows poster], I'm a very big F1 fan. This weekend is the first race of the season, and this is a F1 car that was last year at the French grand prix with the EG logo on it. I keep this close to me, and I guess it makes sense being in this space with all of the racing. Anyway, great to be here. And same as just about everyone said, I know some of you and looking forward to meeting everybody else.

Ed Collupy Thank you. Sorin, I don't know that I've seen that car racing up the Mass Turnpike ...

Sorin Hilgen Nah, wouldn't make it.

Ed Collupy And last, but not least, Steve Morris, who I am getting to know today.

Steve Morris Thank you. Yes, I'll finish it out by a 25-minute PowerPoint presentation if you want to share that with everybody. Just kidding.

Ed Collupy OK, I'm ready to go.

Steve Morris When I turned 16, mom said, go get a job. That was 26 years ago and I worked for the SuperAmerica and Speedway brands for most of that. I think I may hold the record with this group for having been acquired the most times within that SuperAmerica Speedway group. I think we were bought six times in nine years. So, a master of acquisitions, usually on the acquired side. I left right as Speedway was being acquired. I left right before the 7-Eleven deal finished up to go work for two individuals who you may have heard of — Roy and Eva and the StrasGlobal group. I came to work and that's how I came into that world and that orbit. They decided that they were going to, it wasn't retire, it was rewire, I think is what it was. And as they were looking at their rewiring, I picked up the mantle of what was StrasGobal and started the company called RMI or Retail Managment Inc., which is really StrasGlobal 2.0.

We are a contract operator in marketing services, and we run stores for other people — convenience and truck stops. We've done some small format retail, such as facilities like yours in those commercial spaces with a company out in New York called Newsstand, which Roy had partnered with prior to that, and then some small food and beverage facilities as well.

I like to get yelled at a lot. So in my free time I umpire softball and I somehow managed to be elected to our local city council — Woodbury, Minnesota, population 80,000. So I really do, between retail operations and my other jobs, like getting yelled at with the occasional strongly worded letter — just bring it on. I've got thick skin. Roy, Eva and Myra will know the object that I'm going to use and I see Eva's nodding her head yes. It sits in my background.

I was once threatened that I had to take it home because I brought it to every single meeting after I won it. And that is of course my Emmy award [holds up Emmy award]. So, I can actually say I'm an Emmy award-winning marketing director. When I worked for SuperAmerica after a week or two of bringing it to every meeting, pounding it on the table and saying, your Emmy award-winning marketing director is here, we can start the meeting, my boss said, 'No, you've got to take it home.' So here it sits on the shelf behind me and I bring it up in every meeting I possibly can as a reminder of "that's a great idea. Who's the Emmy award winner?" So, it's all in good fun, but looking forward to learning from y'all and meeting and working with you guys and getting it started.

Ed Collupy Thanks, and great to know an Emmy award winner for the first time. Thanks, Steve and thank you all for taking time to introduce yourselves. Just so you know, there are a few other people that you may see on the call that are Vision Group Network support staff and they're here just to listen in. In case you were wondering who Angie, Renee and Mel are, they're in the background to help us. So with that I want to just take a few minutes to kind of kick us off with some thoughts. Oh, go ahead Ray.

Raymond Huff I didn't hear from Eva or Roy. Are they going to give their little spiel?

Ed Collupy Roy will round us out at the end and Eva may chime in then as well. And Cheryl, thanks for having joined for the bit you could and I'm sure we'll hear your voice as we go down the road. We knew Cheryl was going to have to move along, so thanks, Cheryl. But is that all right Ray? We'll let them go.

Raymond Huff That's fine. I just didn't want to leave them out. [laugh]

NEXT: The Presentation

Presentation: Ed Talk

Ed Collupy

Very good. No, I wasn't leaving them out. There's a plan behind this [laugh]. I want to just kick us off with a little bit of Ed's thinking and give you a little bit of an Ed Talk, pun intended, to help get us started and then we'll get into some conversation.

So, back during COVID I had the opportunity to, and was asked to, just share some thoughts on where I thought the convenience petrol — now, as Rance showed us, energy industry — was headed; where we had come from as an industry on the technology front. And I put together this video just to give it some sense of where things were and where we were headed. If you would, let me just share this video for a moment, we'll get underway. [Shows "Epic Convenience" slideshow.]

Well, that was two and a half years ago, and it was at a time when you and your companies were implementing really fast, and faster than ever, things like self-checkout, pickup and delivery, and really working hard to improve the customer experience, digitally in particular. And if I look back, I came into this industry in the late '90s and quickly discovered how far behind the industry was on the tech front compared to the similarities I had brought with me from the grocery business. But despite that, I really believed and had some hope, because the industry had just led the way with self-service through pay at the pump. It really provided for a better understanding of how payments worked, and it changed the industry. Pay at the pump was epic, but to me its innovation didn't create enough momentum to become a jumping off point for the industry.

Frictionless

But by the time 2020 and 2021 came along, something was definitely changing. Part of that change was the novel coronavirus and that caused the retail industry to go viral on less — **less touch, less friction, less time** — all with the hope that it could bring more — more safety, more consumer traffic, more operational efficiency. And it took time for this next epic event to occur. And I say it was epic not because of the convenience industry's innovation, but rather the approach that each of you and your companies took toward implementation. And the approach I saw to make it epic was one where investments, dollars and people, risks with quicker QA and more live store testing, and support, with executives buying in faster and vendors being more responsive. All those things became aligned. And sure, some of you, — particularly the IT leaders — you're going to say, 'Oh, well that's because executives and operators took something out of my playbook and became agile.'

But a few years later, what has lasted? Did the marketing programs create stickiness with the consumer and how much implementation risk are you still taking? So those are some of the things I hope to hear your perspective on as the Convenience Technology Vision Group comes together for the first time today.

But before that, let's take a quick look ahead and think about if, and how, the industry can become the trailblazers we once were when we took the concept — self-service — and brought it to life in such a way that it became a model for so many other payment-driven consumer transactions. So as I think about it, my 'what's next' for the industry, it takes me to the buzz around artificial intelligence as a way to — yep, another pun intended — drive the industry forward. But I scratch my head because I don't believe intelligence is artificial.

AI

The reason for this is that human intelligence is based on a combination of experience, intuition, and creativity, whereas **AI** is limited by the rules that it has been programmed to follow.

Now, I'm not saying that AI is not important or that it doesn't have value — far from it. AI has already made a huge impact and it has the potential to revolutionize, but it's important that we recognize the limitations of AI and understand that it is not a replacement for human intelligence.

OK, I've got to admit those last two paragraphs, they were AI-generated thanks to ChatGPT. But despite my ask of ChatGPT, it couldn't speak to how artificial intelligence alone could be the next epic event in our industry. Intelligence has begun to shape how AI and computer vision, using legacy camera technology, can inform.

Marketing

And I know some of us in this meeting room have seen how it provided a smart — yep, another pun — retailer with the information he needed to reshape who his new store should be **marketing** to. He thought his main consumers were construction workers. There was all kinds of construction, residential, business construction going on within a couple miles of his store. But by asking the right question of an AI system, he found out in less than a week that 60% of his consumers and people coming into the store were women and soccer moms. So, back to the drawing board.

Data

And what else is on the horizon that will require us to be wise and thoughtful? Well, **data**'s one of those and there's an endless amount of it as you all know, but it's foundational to being intelligent retailers. Questions like, How do I use it to find the next new-to-industry build, or profitably enhance the consumer offer? What do I need to know to bring alive the hope of more?

I read in a recent study that Ricoh had done that 80% of business data is trapped. And then I've heard from a number of

IT leaders [about] just that problem, and they're all saying, 'I need a data strategy,' but then ask the question, how do I get that started? To me, it's a combination of things and most importantly, it's going to be about people and it's going to be, how do those people make intelligent use of things like machine learning and AI tools? So I was hoping Cheryl would be here and be able to chime in on this, but as we all know, retailing is a people business and retailers looking to be intelligent about this are taking a holistic view.

Consumer Experience

At the NRF show this year, which I had an opportunity to attend, I heard many retailers saying that the **consumer experience** needs to begin with the employee's experience, and then let the employee then, in turn, become the influencer, an ambassador to the brand. Personalization — that gets to the heart of the consumer. And it's here, I believe, that AI can help that journey, moving it from mass curation to segments and then to the individual.

Marketing

But on balance, AI marketing initiatives will still require the **marketer** to bring to the table their creativity, their ability to emotionally connect with consumers, and most importantly, their intuition.

Inventory Control

Earlier I mentioned less — less friction, less time. It brings me to a thought: Let's get more intelligent around **inventory** and not let out-of-stocks or overstocks be what I see as a perpetual friction. Sensors and RFID (Radio Frequency Identifiction) are some of the technologies that can be more prevalent ways to keep track of inventory in real time. I had a group of folks around the table with me a couple of months back and an idea emerged around this: Why not put the tax stamps on cigarettes to an additional use, by not only meeting a government requirement, but also having it be an RFID tag that could help achieve improved accuracy and efficiency around the most inventoried items that we see in the convenience store. How smart might an initiative like that be to put great collaborative minds to work on?

Checkout

And oh, let's not forget the debate around **checkout**. Trial seems to be the prevalent approach across the industry, whether it's self-checkout, autonomous checkout, or over in Europe, the "let's have a chat" checkout [as created by Jumbo, a Dutch grocery store with over 700 locations, for customers who are not in a rush and want to converse with the cashier] and, oh yeah, the traditional cashier checkout. But where and when will the intelligence on what is best for all the people involved come from?

Barcodes

And give me a moment, a pet peeve. Hopefully the industry will be more intelligent than we were with EMV and how we approach the **UPC** becoming history with GS1's announcement of Sunrise 2027, which sets the date transitioning to 2D barcodes and QR codes. So, I say onward, let's move from epic convenience to intelligent convenience.

Enough of me, in this meeting, as we go forward, there is always going to be the opportunity for an open space. It's the times where you folks are going to be able to have a conversation with each other. Think of it as a break in a conference — a coffee break or a lunch break. It's like you're sitting around a table — not a traditional Q&A type of mode. So, I'm excited to hear what's on your mind this afternoon. Take what I said: do you think there's validity in 'There is nothing artificial about intelligence.' Tell us what you think is next for the industry. Who wants to get us started?

If there's no hands, I assure you I'm going to go around the room and get us started. Go ahead, Ray.

NEXT: The Discussion

The Discussion

Raymond Huff

Consumer Experience

I see from a technology standpoint, I see the convenience store industry just moving really fast at making sure that the **customers** can get in and get out whatever way possible. The whole thing about friction has now come back to the customer really wants to talk to people, but they still want to get in and out fast and have the product. I see food being a really big deal in our industry. Technology is going to just propel that piece. I think we'll beat the quick-service restaurants in how we are able to deliver product to the customer, be it what you mentioned, self-checkout, autonomous checkout, whatever it might be. But the fact is that in what, six years, five years, we went from just selling Cokes, smokes and potato chips to real food products that people actually line up to come and get. I mean I think that the industry has grown and will continue to grow on that level.

Ed Collupy

Roy.

Roy Strasburger

I think the technology is really interesting. First of all, thank you, everybody, for joining us today. I mean, this is really exciting to have this group of people with us on the call and on the discussion. The mission of what we were trying to do is to share information with all retailers — big, small and across the country. And the open discussion that we're going to have at this meeting and the next few meetings will be really good. Today's more of a general meeting where we were kicking things off and getting to know each other. In the future there'll be more specific topics.

But I think the idea of technology, as a whole, kind of falls into three different things. One is the customer interaction, one is operational efficiency, and the other is dealing with people as far as employees and our humans that work in the store.

Dumb Technology

And I get concerned sometimes, sort of to your point, Ed, that people get hung up on what they consider to be smart technology when there's still a lot of application for **dumb technology**. There is technology to make life easier, make things more efficient, take out the mundane work that has to go in — that's why people lose their interest in their jobs because of the paperwork they're filling out all the time.

And I think there's a really great opportunity for this group and for us to share how technology can apply. We're not looking for coding or standards or that type of thing. We're looking how far do you apply technology to save time, money, and to make people happier? And, to finish that up, the concern is that we're always looking for shiny new technology applications when there's a lot of dirty work that can be done by technology to make life easier for everybody.

Ed Collupy Thanks. Lorne.

Lorne Brockway I think it's pretty interesting as you talk about AI and then Roy with the dumb technology, that you still need to have a lot of that. Where I think that AI can help us a lot, not only in the mundane back office — my inventory turns and things like that — but also some of the things Ed had mentioned — the things we had done with the video camera.

Operations

Let's make sure, **operationally**, that these things are happening. Here's a reminder: We haven't seen this, again as it's using that visual AI, but how do we help those frontline employees? How do you have a better interaction? What did you do right? What did you do wrong? And how you can use technology, because those people are still there. That's the face of your store, of your business. And again, we always talk about: Let's do everything we can to make their lives easier. Well, let's make their lives easier, but let's also improve those engagements that they do have with all of our customers. And AI, I think, could be used very well for that kind of employee learning: here's what you could do better, here's what you could do worse, or watch the new folks and help them through that process.

Ed Collupy And as we heard from Nick, who is going to go next, the frontline employee is key to it all. Nick, go ahead.

Nick Peters I just wanted to call out a couple of points that were made, and I appreciate the comment that **dumb technology** still has a place in this world because I just want to echo that sentiment. Sometimes I think we get into a world where we seriously overthink a situation.

Dumb Technology

Labor

Number two, I think the thing that we need to keep in mind, and it kind of ties in with our cashiers and our CSRs, is how our **site-level personnel** engage with us. We need to understand that there is a generational shift occurring. We are in the middle of it right now. (I'm a Gen X.) What do millennials want? And understanding what customer engagement looks like is 180 degrees different than from what I want to experience versus what a 18, 19, 20, 21-year-old individual wants to experience.

Consumer Experience

And so, when we talk about what our **customer experience** looks like, it should be agile, different, and almost splintered to some respect. We still need to have a holistic vision in mind about how we talk to that customer: it is cashier engagement, it is self-checkout, it is technologies like Skip Technology and things like. Just keep in mind that the engagement is not going to be consistent, and it's not going to be repetitive. And really smart retailers are going to figure out how to attack customer engagementon multiple fronts there. Just kind of wanted to bring that one up.

Ed Collupy No, that's great, thank you. Donnie.

Donnie Rhoads I just want to echo, first of all, I also appreciated the dumb technology comment. And Nick, when it comes to what you said about the splintered aspect of this conversation, that resonated with me. At our stores, we really pride ourselves on being fixtures in the community and reflecting the neighborhoods that we're in. It's a deeply personal thing when a customer comes in and chooses to spend time in our stores and shop our stores. And then, at least this is a personal thing for me, but when I think about the notions of artificial intelligence or a lot of the really grand technological innovations, there's something impersonal about that and that's a bridge that we're going to need to cross. Or like you said, at least be agile in the way that we kind of work around not wanting to alienate the customers but still removing friction. Maybe that doesn't mean getting them in and out of the store as fast as possible, but it does mean making their lives easier in the process.

Ed Collupy Donnie, you make the comment around community, and I've heard this from a number of retailers especially those that operate within a finite area, but then I think about how do people at larger companies that are spread across the United States, as Ken indicated they are in their company at Majors, how do you then localize, right? I mean, I think that becomes a bigger challenge and event a challenge for community-based stores.

Donnie Rhoads Just really quick, it's a challenge even for us as an eight-store chain and one region of one state. We still have very distinct kinds of personalities between our different stores. And if you're going to offer a suite of technology solutions across them, they still need to be able to retain that independence of their identity. So yeah, it is a challenge and I'd love to hear from somebody who doesn't have eight stores, but maybe 800.

Ed Collupy There you go. Robert, you were next. And then we'll go to Steve after you.

Operations

Robert Hampton Some great discussion going on here. And I appreciate, again, the dumb technology comment. My perspective is how can we leverage the technology? Ed, you mentioned the intelligence, the artificial intelligence and machine learning. How can we leverage that technology to make things easier for our **frontline employees**? Specifically, can the technology look at all the video and tell us, these three things need to be done to make our employees more effective. We don't need to bombard people with mounds of information when it is just going to eventually be background noise because there's too much to look at. But the artificial intelligence can sort through all that and just say, these are the top three things you need to do. And maybe put them in a list or have them show up on an iPad or something in the store which says, 'Hey, there's a spill over here. We've detected a spill. You need to address that.'

Somebody in the food prep area doesn't have their headgear on or is not wearing gloves, et cetera. Those critical things that makes the experience better for the consumer, but also gives the employee more time because they're only focusing on those critical things that need to be done. And so that was one thought.

Labor

And then also a kind of a tangential thought is: I think what we're seeing in the industry, and I like to call it the consumerization of IT, is that Apple and Google and some of these other companies have made technology so easy and so intuitive, like your iPhone or whatever. I've heard people just say, just make it work like my fantasy football. I want to start Pat Mahomes this week. I could just drag him over here. And now he starts. And I'm thinking of our **frontline employees**, why can't I just swap shifts with somebody because my kid has a thing to do or whatever, and why can't I just drag and drop the shifts on the schedule just like I can my lineup in fantasy football?

So I think consumers and our employees will be affected and we have to watch out for our employees, especially the younger generation who have grown up with this type of technology. We've got to be careful that we're catering to them and that we make it a place that's easy for them to come to want to work. Because as we're starting to see, we're moving more and more into a gig worker situation.

And I know Janeth, you've certainly leveraged that over at Circle K. A lot of the new generation workers, they just want to work so many shifts a week and they want to pick and choose, and maybe one week it's Circle K and the next week it's McDonald's and Walmart or somewhere else. So, a lot of things to think about, but really focus on how technology and how consumers are using technology and how that impacts the way we need to think about it within our stores and in the presentation to the customer.

Ed Collupy

I know I was going to jump to Steve next, but Janeth, you were mentioned there relative to the gig worker. I don't know if you want to chime in and just add a little bit of what's going on at Circle K in that world and how you see it fitting into all this discussion.

Janeth Falcon

Labor

Happy to. We're using a product, it's a mobile-based application, that allows each of the **workers** to go in and sign in for shifts. It's worked well for us because the reality is we are facing challenges with labor, and this gives us an additional group of workers that can work the different shifts for us and even segment it by tasks. And you can even put in there what kind of skills are needed to perform a particular task. So it's been really good for us to allow us to flex our staffing levels at our stores.

Ed Collupy Thanks for taking time to explain what that is all about. Steve, you were up next with your hand up and then we'll go to Sorin and then Scott.

Steve Morris I think this conversation moves super quick. So, my point would've been maybe two or three speakers ago there, but that's really interesting Janeth. But as Donnie was talking, I think there was a conversation about how there is still a desire for stupid technology. There's still a desire to be locally connected to the individual site. I think Donnie, that was your point and there's still a lot of pride in that. I'm always amazed by the NACS data that says the number of single store or one or two store owners, as a percentage of industry. From a technology standpoint is how do we — Donnie, you're a big retailer at eight stores — consider those one- or two-store owners and the percentage of the industry that is made up of small operators while the Circle Ks, the 7-Elevens and the big guys are the drivers of technology, pioneers of technology, how does that filter down to us little guys and how are we able to get that in place affordably?

But then I think the other hurdle for me, when I talk to my clients who are one- and two-store owners, is not just affordability from a dollar standpoint, but it's the ROI on their time. What is this going to save them? What's the advantage of this? These are folks that know every customer that walks in the door, what is this technology going to do for my customer and is it worth not just my dollars that I'm going to pay for this technology, but is it worth it from a time standpoint? And those hurdles just seem to become more and more draws on time. Janeth, you talked about labor and staffing issues. That's never going to go away. But how, and when, do we make technology easily adaptable, easily affordable for what continues to be a vast majority of store count in the convenience store world. Just my thoughts.

Ed Collupy Very good. Thanks Steve. Sorin, you had your hand up next.

Sorin Hilgen What I was going to add is it's been years and years that we've been collecting gobs of **data** and trying to do things with it. And I think we've been somewhat efficient with it and maybe somewhat not efficient and the data's just there that we don't really have the capabilities to really drive insights out of it at the speed that we would need. And for many years companies have been talking about being data-driven oriented and so on and the attempt to get there. I think with AI and machine learning that's going to help us get there. It's basically another tool. The way that I look at it, it's another tool for us to leverage to focus in and move us closer to getting those insights and ultimately helping provide those really hyper-focused experiences. Maybe starting off on the digital side because it's easier to get to that hyper-focused level on the digital side and then expanding it across into the non-digital world, if you will.

Data Analysis

Ed Collupy How do you think the trust factor comes into AI? I mean today I think people are experimenting with it just like I did with ChatGPT, but my guess is that will drive some question around the truthfulness of it and how does it become another source of truth?

Sorin Hilgen It'll take time. We have to weather a little bit of the hype around AI right now because there's a lot of hype and there's a lot of misunderstanding of what it actually can do. I think we're already thinking about the sci fi levels of AI, which we're nowhere near there. But I think if we have very directed and very focused tasks or exercises, I think little by little we'll get to that point. And at least from what I'm seeing, the more data you throw at it, the better it will learn and the better your outcomes are going to be. Right? So as we're collecting all this data from all of our systems, including the IoT devices and so on, and feeding that into the models, I think the models will get better and better and then we'll have more trust in the outcomes or the results, if you will.

Ed Collupy Great. And Scott, you were up next.

Scott Smith I am giving a speech later for one of my employees getting an award at an awards banquet, and I couldn't come up with a speech on my own. So, I got ChatGPT to do it and I submitted it to the HR team and the leadership team, and they all came back and said, wow, that was one of the most thoughtfully written pieces about an employee that we've ever read. And I came back and I was like, well, I didn't write it, I had a hard time, I couldn't figure it out, but it executes everything that we really want to see in one of our speeches. And what I harken back to is that it doesn't need to replace certain things we do, it just needs to be there to assist. And I think it [ChatGPT] proved today for me, that I can go in and I can put certain touches into it to make it a little bit more personal, but it did it on its own by me giving a few features about that person and then their job description and what I wanted to say. So, I'm curious to see what it does in the future for our customers. And I'm also curious to see how it enables the customer service experience.

Ed Collupy Are you going to give credit to Chat GPT? [laughs]

Scott Smith I'm actually going to give credit at the end. I want people to clap and then I'll give credit out.

Ed Collupy [laughs] Very good. Excellent. Hey Nick, go ahead.

Nick Peters If this isn't the right time it's fine. I kind of wanted to build off of this whole conversation around AI a little bit and I don't think I'm going to get a better opportunity to ask the brightest minds in the room. So, I'm going to take the opportunity here. When does **data collection** go too far for us as retailers? When does it become all about curating the customer experience

Data Analysis

and then it goes one step further and becomes too intrusive? We got a lot of different minds in this room and I'm just really curious as to where people's heads are at with that, because the more I know about you, the more curated experience I can create for you. But I just got to imagine at some point people feel like there's a lack of trust and I don't want you to know this much about me. So, I was just really wanting to hear the room's thoughts on this, if we could take the time.

Ed Collupy Sure. That's what this is all about as Roy pointed out. So, by all means posing a question and getting the group to chime in is great. Steve, go ahead. You were next.

Steve Morris Nick, to respond to that, we ran under the SuperAmerica brand a loyalty program which was copied from Speedway. It was all intellectual knowledge. We didn't violate anything, but it was copied from the Speedy Rewards program, which was obviously the largest in the industry. We had a million members in that database at one point in time with our 200 and whatever stores, and what we heard loud and clear from customers was, what is that breaking point? Because we just kept asking, give us this information and give us this information. And finally, what was that breaking point? There was a consumer understanding that you're going to collect the information about my purchases, I'm fine, I don't care. We know from a marketing standpoint we can start targeting ads.

But when we started collecting information about where do you live, what's your zip code, what's your annual household income, the big one, which we had a really hard time with, was what is your phone number? They give us some of the demographics, zip code, they're fine with that. But the moment that we asked for phone number, that was the breaking point of how much information do you want. And I don't know what I was going to do with it, is it a unique identifier? I don't know what the heck I was going to do with it because the goal for me was their purchase data, nothing else. So that's interesting.

Ed Collupy Very good. Thanks for chiming in there, Steve. Rance, let's hear from you.

Rance Wells To piggyback on what Steve's saying, for our **loyalty program** you can't sign up for it unless you give your phone number. So [laugh], I thought that was very interesting. The future's not always evenly distributed. Like Target. There's a book by Charles Duhigg called "The Power of Habit," and in that book it talks about a teenage daughter Target knows is pregnant before the father of the house knows that she's pregnant. They were already sending coupons for prenatal vitamins and diapers and such. So, we're not unique as c-store operators in this, but at some point Big Brother's going to get a little creepy on you, so don't be that predictive I guess, right? I don't know.

Loyalty Programs

Ed Collupy Very good.

Mike Templeton I had the same example come to mind, Rance, when this was brought up. I think Gartner has some great stuff in this space. We've done a lot of reading on personalization. I think they probably even rationalized it to the amount of **data points** being used in order to inform some sort of a prediction or a recommendation. And I think part of what they came back with, as far as consumer perception was, the fewer data points you can use to make a recommendation, the better. Because if you can do something with two data points but you're collecting 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 points, it's going to get to that point where you're talking about things that I don't believe you should know about. And ultimately at the end of the day, none of us are sophisticated enough to truly be able to put all that stuff into practice in our world.

Data Analysis

You ask the question, Nick, how far is too far? I know this isn't for you specifically, but if you've got to ask yourself that question, it's probably too far. And I think we've all been overwhelmed with this opportunity. I think we ask 10 fields to sign up for loyalty. We don't need all 10 of those things to identify somebody and track what's happening with purchases. So, I think in the wake of all of this stuff, CCPA (California Consumer Privacy Act), there's more states bringing [restrictions] in the U.S., I think there'll probably be a push to back off some of those things. People will ask what they will actually use. And as a result of that, I think that'll help us back away from the scariness of giving up all this information to everybody.

Ed Collupy Thanks, Mike. Steve, do you want to chime in or did your chat take care of it? OK, very good.

Donnie Rhoads I especially liked what Mike just said about maybe some of this reeling back a little bit. The question is how far is too far, at least for me, and I'm a young person. But for the people who opt into a loyalty app or give away their data, have got to the point where I think that there is a lot of comfort about giving away personal information — if you understand the benefits coming to you. But beyond that shroud — the interface where a customer's going to engage with your app — there's a lot of unknowns as to how far this could really go until a regulatory agency decides to step in, or there are people out in the streets screaming, give me my phone number back or something. But we haven't gotten there yet. And I think it's also a splintered conversation. Back to what Nick was saying earlier, we have older customers and we have younger customers and we don't want to alienate any of them, but that's a danger when you're talking about the different demographics that were mentioned.

Ed Collupy Very good. Lorne, go ahead and chime in.

Lorne Brockway I think one of the things, I'm going to call it the ethical collection of data, is what you can ask the customer for and what they're willing to give up. But what data can collect on that customer using artificial intelligence, such as using video intelligence? If I know that a customer comes in, and I can recognize their license plate while they're getting gas, and they're entering a loyalty number, I can connect those two transactions. I know that they drive a GMC 1500 for example. Now I know that they come in and they've got two children with them. Can I now assume they use their loyalty number during that transaction? Can I put those two data points together and now say, OK, well I know that Sally comes in and she has two children with her. So do we market like that? I think there's some questions about what is too far. What is too far from what you're going to ask the customer, and what is too far ethically that can be determined based on this technology that's coming out. I think that's going to be a bigger question.

Ed Collupy

Absolutely. I mentioned that I was at that the NRF show this year and happened to run into a couple of guys that are in startup mode with a business that they're going to focus on the c-store industry first using a listening capability. They will listen in on the conversation between cashiers and consumers and then run it through an AI model to capture different types of data what were the interactions about and did they accomplish what we set out to do. I think that then gets into another whole discussion around the ethics of technology and those types of things. They say it's all legal, they've done their work around that. Go ahead, Roy.

Roy Strasburger

Well, as somebody who comes from the last century, first of all, I'm convinced that Alexa listens to me and that everybody in Seattle is sending me requests and information based upon what Alexa hears. Call me paranoid, but hey, that's the way it goes. In regards to giving information, I think that everybody understands now that there is the quid pro quo as Donnie and others have talked about. I don't mind giving information if I think there's a beneficial reward to it and that I'm getting something out of it. But typically, I am comfortable going as far as zip codes, and I don't mind phone numbers, but you start asking for my house address and you start doing other things like that, you start getting into the data hacking and the data breaching concerns that might go somewhere from there.

And in regard to how far is too far from using data, once again, I don't mind somebody extrapolating from my purchase what I may purchase next. If I buy Dr. Pepper and they give me a coupon for Dr. Pepper for my next purchase, that's cool. But if they start doing these very kind of creepy predictive suggestions that if I like Dr. Pepper that I'm going to want a Twinkie to go with it or a Frito Pie, that's where I start getting a little bit worried about what the algorithms are doing from getting overly invasive. And I think that even though there is a shift in how people react to their data based upon age and generational aspects — I mean, my kids and their friends are much more lax about giving up their data privacy than I am

— I think even they start pushing back if they feel like it's being manipulated in ways that's out of their control and that are a little bit more predictive than they would like. Nobody wants to feel like they're being controlled by somebody else. And I think that's where you start getting into some of those concerns.

Ed Collupy Go ahead, Rance.

Rance Wells I was going to talk about how we're all honest operators not wanting to collect data, but ByteDance [the China-based owner of TikTok] is over here getting everything and they want everything. All the social media companies , unless you drag them to Congress, they're not going to tell you what they're getting. I think there's a lot of hope in the room over here on our side saying, hey, look, we're wanting to do the [right thing] where, on the other side, states are banning data collection I think there's a bill in Congress trying to ban TikTok in the United States, those kinds of things.

Roy Strasburger Rance, to jump in, I think you bring up a really good point. One of the things that I am really excited about is having Janeth and Sorin on this phone call, because both of their companies have international experience, and not only will they, I hope, be able to give us some insight as to what technologies are coming and what are being applied in other places, there's also the regulatory aspect of it. Because, for example, the European Union is way out in front of the United States and other countries from a privacy point of view, from how data is used and stored. And all of that's going to affect how we react in the United States. Many United States companies now abide by the European Union privacy data protection laws because they can't tell who's using their stuff or when somebody's going to use their stuff in that jurisdiction. So there's a knock-on effect, kind of like California setting emission results, that affects everybody else in the marketplace. I think it's going to be really interesting to see how all this evolves, and it's evolving very quickly.

Ed Collupy Janeth and Sorin?

Janeth Falcon Agreed. GDPR (Global Data Protection Regulation) is probably the strictest data privacy requirements we have and that's our default. We have to be compliant to that across the globe. So we do have to take that into consideration. When we are actually bringing technology from the U.S. to scale to Europe or vice versa, we have to make sure that the product supports the regulatory requirements for those different countries. Think about labor scheduling. We have a product we're testing in the U.S. that we like to bring onto Europe, but we got to make sure that product supports all of the requirements by country. So, it makes it a little bit more complicated for us to roll out global solutions.

Ed Collupy Sorin, any thoughts.

Sorin Hilgen

I completely agree. And obviously GDPR is huge, but I think there's some things that go beyond that, like the data localization in Germany where the data cannot leave German territory, even if it's in the cloud, it has to be on German territory. It's things like that that we need to work with and understand.

I think it's also, as as some have mentioned, the individual. From at least from what I'm seeing from a European perspective, they really think a lot more about what data they give and how comfortable they are with giving up that information. Whereas over here most consumers are like, yeah, sure, whatever, I don't care, here you go. So, it is the individuals that I think are driving the restrictions and then the GDPR type frameworks are being built around what is asked by the people. Whereas here, I'm not really seeing a movement for that other than the CCPA which is making its way across in other states. It's going to be interesting to see how it progresses.

Ed Collupy

Thanks for sharing that. Eva, go ahead.

Eva Strasburger

I was going to go back to the TikTok talk about the fact that the younger generations are using TikTok, and they're being told that every time they swipe, someone is getting information on them. But they don't care, even if you tell them some people think that China is watching them. You're giving away what the inside of your house looks like, where you are, what your habits are, where you like to go and eat and where you drive every day. I was reading a report about the Gen Zs and they were saying that before COVID, they were very careful about what information they shared, but coming out of COVID, they realized that by using data and their social media how much they could learn from it. So now they're much more willing to share and give because they've become more sophisticated about how they use what you give back to them.

And in fact, today's consumer is a much more intelligent consumer and typically knows more about the retailer than the retailer knows about them. They are actually using the data in a very intelligent way to decide — do they want to shop at this store? What are its sustainability policies, what are its ethics? Who are they supporting in the community? And so you're seeing a two-way effect about how people are using the data. It's not just us, the retailer, but it's also them, the consumer, which needs to be taken into account.

Ed Collupy

Very good. Hey Erin, I want you to have a chance to chime in. What do you think?

Erin Graziosi

I don't really have a difference of opinion currently. I mean, yeah, I'm not shy when I do [laugh].

Ed Collupy

Very good. I don't want you to miss an opportunity to even ask a question, but thanks. How about beyond AI conversation this afternoon? Not surprisingly, as I said it's the buzz, but what else is driving things in your mind around where technology is headed in the industry? Mike, go ahead.

Mike Templeton Just something that was said earlier. We were talking about the divide between the big ones and the small ones. I was at Convenience Retailing University this week. I think I can say that since this is a pro-Winsight [laugh] group. But one of the opening speakers this week was talking about his convenience store experience as a kid growing up in southern Minnesota. And I kind of giggled and looked around. They were like, oh, I wonder who it would be? And inevitably a photo of Casey's popped up and it was this yellow tin building with the red roof on it. And I find myself, even in my role here, thinking of us as that little store. I don't picture us as the third-largest convenience retailer in the country. But I think what we are up against is Chick-fil-A, Walmart, Target, Dollar General, Amazon and anywhere else anyone can spend their dollars.

And so it's great that we have this group here because I think we can help figure out what that means for our channel, but it's also not just about us and what we are doing. I think it is challenging to think about how to make those right types of investments that make sense. They're going to pay off because at some point, at some level, if you don't have it, the customer can easily go somewhere that does. But certainly Janeth, myself and others have a different level of resources. But I think what's interesting has been the rise of the Squares of the world, the Toasts of the world who have gone in and said, well, we'll figure out this problem just like Visa and Mastercard figured out the problem, right? There's no restaurant I can find where I can't hand over a piece of plastic and pay for my meal. And I think it's going to take that next wave of companies to be able to unpack some of these types of technology experiences to make them available in all types and sizes of businesses. Because I think that truly will be something that we will have to have. So, it's interesting for us to think about it and what we're up against.

Ed Collupy Yeah, I think there's a whole new definition of convenience and even who the players are to your point of Chick-fil-A and folks like them. Go ahead, Eva.

Gamification

Eva Strasburger So, a retailer recently asked us whether anyone knows of an app where they're **gamifying** it so that employees can earn points to then choose their shift? So if they've got to the top level, they can get first preference of choosing their shifts or they do a two-hour shift instead of a six-hour shift by earning points. Do any of you know whether that exists? [no response from the group] So no one's doing gamification?

Mike Templeton I've heard that McDonald's has started to roll points into some of their internal experiences, whether it's completing trainings or things like that. But I don't know, taking it to the level that you just described, which was to turn those points into a currency that could improve what their actual employee experience is. I think it's interesting.

Ed Collupy And I'm going to have to go back and look Eva, because I've heard something similar. I'll do some research for you. Robert.

Myra Kressner I'm just going to jump in. I think it was at our Convenience Leaders Vision Group — one of the members.

Eva Strasburger Annie Gauthier.

Myra Kressner Yes, Annie Gauthier brought that up, that that's something that they're looking at and wanted to know if there was anyone else that was using that.

Ed Collupy Thanks, Myra. Go ahead Robert.

Robert Hampton Just to kind of piggyback with what Mike was saying, I think in this industry we are competing with the Chick-fil-A's and some of the other players. And unfortunately, they're not as constrained as we are. And we've talked about this in the Conexxus meetings about how we have a lot of **legacy equipment** that we have to connect to. And I'll just mention dispensers, of course. It would be great if we could just put in a Toast or some other little iPad to be able to check people out. And that's the experience that the customer has down at the ice cream store a block away. And then they come into our store and they've got all this elaborate stuff. And especially in my case, we're burdened with Shell and Chevron because we've got to ride on their credit rails and it takes twice as long as it does to go down the street to an unbranded location. Yes, it's really frustrating. I think as an industry, we've got to get to the point where we can be as agile as some of these other folks and use a Toast if that's what we want to use or use something else. But that's certainly a problem.

Legacy Technology

Ed Collupy Go ahead, Steve.

Steve Morris To piggyback on what Robert was saying, but also to Mike's point, if you go back five, 10 years pre-COVID, if you go back and ask who **your competitor list** was, most of the operators will list out the convenience stores of the world. Then it started to expand into food service. To your point, Chick-fil-A. Now the QSRs are a competitor. But I once heard somebody talk and they said no, listen guys, Amazon is your competitor. And it's not because they sell fuel, but it's because they sold the trip that took somebody to the Target or the Walmart or the QSR, wherever it was, they sold that trip. Now that trip is gone. You lost that trip. Because I think the big question mark, and remember we're all at the symposiums, was where'd all the transactions go? Where'd everybody go? So Amazon is certainly a competitor as we look at it from a technology

Channel Blurring

standpoint because with those fill-in shops, not only do we miss the physical trip, but we also miss those fill-in shops because they're just so incredibly smart in their use of technology.

Loyalty Programs

But then to just run right over to what Robert was saying. We have all this legacy equipment. The question for me on the technology standpoint keeps coming back to ROI, but the consumers don't want another app. My phone is filled with all these apps from a one-time use standpoint. So what does that get me? And what is the benefit for me to download an app, Roy addressed this question, what am I going to get? I'm OK and I'm comfortable sharing information and downloading an app and making that investment as a consumer, but if I'm **downloading an app**, is it worth it? Am I really going to do it? And is our space the right space to justify the app?

Now I'm a Minnesota guy, so I'm a huge Casey's fan and it is the best pizza on the planet Earth, no offense to anybody that sells pizza, but it really is the best pizza on planet Earth. But do we have the cost benefit argument to the consumers to download our app. To Robert's point, to work with all this technology, if I've got to do three different things in order to get what I want what am I being offered for it? So, can the technology be, and remember our industry is convenience, can the technology be convenient with a return for the consumer? That's one of the first questions and hurdles that I would think of as a retailer. And then I've got to get through all the other retailer hurdles. But we just got to keep asking. We just keep throwing technology out. Technology is a big word. Is it an app? Is it a loyalty program? Is it whatever it is? We aren't the only ones out there. And it's hard to remember what our space is. Our space is convenience. And that 30-second trip, are we really going to get people to think about that 30-second transaction?

Ed Collupy Gotcha. Donnie.

Steve Morris Donnie's on mute. He's talking about Casey's pizza. I know he is. [laugh]

Donnie Rhoads I was. I was talking about how much I love Casey's pizza. Thank you. Great lip reader there. To Steve's last point about making that investment as a customer. Is this app worth it for me? Is this technology worth it for me? And your mention of legacy systems, I think the same argument applies as operators, especially the ones without as much access to capital, [with] so many of these services they say you will receive X return on this, if you do this, it'll streamline your operations. They're so siloed and they're separated from each other. And it's partly because of this older architecture of technology in our stores. And that's been an interesting kind of field to navigate for us as an organization. Is there a line you have to draw on the sand where it's like, no, enough, I can't have four different software companies doing four different things in

Connectivity

our store because we're all going to go crazy if we have to deal with this many moving pieces. And if there are any players out there who can — and with the conversation of legacy systems, it's tough — create that unified platform, maybe it'll have to be open source or something like that — that to me would be a true game changer.

Ed Collupy There you go, Steve.

Steve Morris To bring Donnie's point and Robert's point together is right, but the old technology is also settled with the fact that many of us are saddled with Big Oil. I've got to have the Chevron program, I've got to have the Phillips program. And so from a cashier standpoint, my big hurdle is for the cashier in that 30-second transaction, to tell the customer, hey, if you download the app, you get X. Well, but that's just for fuel. If you download this app, you can get Y. So how do these connect and how do we get big oil, for those of us that are just handcuffed to these things, to understand that again, we're convenient. I want that customer in and out in 35 seconds — those are huge hurdles for us to overcome.

Legacy Technology

Ed Collupy Mike, you don't have a brand, you have your own brand.

Mike Templeton I was just going to say, we see companies in this room who have traditionally had relationships with big oil companies who've now said, maybe we don't need that anymore. So, I think you're exactly right. Let's be provocative and say, well, what would it take to push someone to be able to use whatever they wanted? Well, you'd have to get an **unbranded fuel supply contract**. What is that worth to your company? Because I agree. I think there's a lot of red tape tied up in these big contracts. And if that's the thing that keeps you from doing what you need to do that's a hard decision to make.

Unbranded Fuel

Ed Collupy Go ahead, Nick.

Nick Peters I do believe we're battling a chicken or the egg type of an argument. And the reason why I say that, is it the hardware manufacturers that are the limiting factor or is it the major oils trying to control the environments altogether? And I think some of you have known me for quite a while and I've always been pretty passionate. I appreciate what the Big Oils are trying to do to some extent, but to me, I think it's very obvious many times that they're always going to take care of their fuel brand first. And oh, by the way, we have retailers too. And so I'm not shy to admit that point and in the spirit of transparency, I have five different fuel brands. So I know that pain and struggle very well. Consistency and implementation, and even experience with all of that to the customer, is just a nightmare to deal with.

Legacy Technology

But I will say one thing regarding the whole, 'what needs to change?' question. I do think that there's only been a limited amount of manufacturer players when it comes to the technology in this industry for however many years you can think about. I've had several conversations with a lot of software developers and a lot of companies overseas, in the U.K. and elsewhere. They want to break into this space. But the forecourt is the problem and that's where the struggle is. And look, I'm just going to say it, those guys have it buttoned up pretty well and nobody's interested in building a brand-new dispenser. Oh wait, **EV charging**. And that's where you're starting to see it. And so I'm not going to get into that element today because it looks like we're eight minutes to five, but I just want to bring up that whole technology, that forecourt is bolted down pretty hard. So, if we're ever going to be successful at that point, we're always going to have to go through the big two or the big three to really make it happen.

NEXT: Closing Thoughts

Closing Thoughts

Ed Collupy Thanks, Nick, and I appreciate you recognizing that we're getting closer to the top of the hour here. So just real quick, one of the things that we want to do on an ongoing basis is not to have an "Ed Talk," as you'd get really tired of me pretty quickly, but to bring a subject matter expert to each of our quarterly meetings and drive conversation around that subject matter expert's presentation to us. So the question is, what do you folks want to see going forward in terms of topics that we should be talking about and guest speaker types that we should be bringing to the conversation as well? Can we just do a quick go around the room and maybe give us your one or two thoughts on what you'd like to see next. And then based on what we hear, we'll try to work toward bringing one of the two top topics to our June meeting. So let's just go around really quick. We'll go alphabetically again, like we did with the introductions. Donnie, you go first.

Donnie Rhoads Nick, I would agree with him. I would love to hear about EV for one of the meetings — that would be something that I would be very interested in.

Ed Collupy Great. Janeth? Ah Erin, I'm sorry. Erin, you're next.

Erin Graziosi Let's see. We actually do EV, so [laugh] not a fan, but that's me. I would say that I don't know what it is specifically, but something with the ability in apps to connect a lot of that stuff together.

Ed Collupy Janeth?

Janeth Falcon Maybe something around next generation retail technology. A lot of us still have a lot of legacy [laugh] equipment at the site. So what's feasible that we can bring into our industry.

Ed Collupy OK. Lorne?

Lorne Brockway I like the EV piece. And also, again, I'm always intrigued by AI and what people are using it for and business cases to put it in place.

Ed Collupy Got it. Mike?

Mike Templeton Really put me on the spot. I just want to talk to all these smart people again in a few months.

Roy Strasburger Ed, if I could jump in for a second. For the folks who talk about EV, what do you mean talking about EV. I'm assuming you're not talking about the actual fueling and recharging and where we're going with it. Is there something more specific about EV that you guys would be interested in?

Ed Collupy Go ahead, Lorne.

Lorne Brockway I think for us it's really about how do we monetize it because we don't like to do anything for free. And what is that ROI?

Mike Templeton Yeah, so maybe for me thinking about the true share that online ordering can represent inside of our industry, as you think about the wild growth of e-commerce now settling back down and what role that can truly play inside a c-store in our unique format.

Ed Collupy OK. Donnie, you went up next.

Donnie Rhoads Just really quick to expand on the EV thing as well. I have this kind of discord when I think about EV charging and the time it takes to charge versus the idea of what convenience means and how often we talk about getting folks in and out of a store. And I think that's an interesting conversation to broach as more of us talk about putting EV chargers at our locations.

Ed Collupy And Nick?

Nick Peters To respond to Roy's question about what specifically on EVs without going too far to getting people uncomfortable, the tactical implications of how to deploy it. And the answer doesn't necessarily always need to be at all of our convenience stores either. It's the concept around what does a smart deployment look like? Should it all be phase three, phase three versus phase two? Are there models out there? And I know there are, but just for the sake of conversation do we as retailers maybe consider an environment where we go engage people that aren't necessarily in the c-store space to try to build upon that ecosystem? In other words, build another series of fueling stations. So, it's kind of where I was at.

Ed Collupy Got it. Thanks for the clarification. And Roy, thanks for asking us to go deeper on it. Rance, topics for next meetings?

Rance Wells That gamification app sounds very interesting. That is something that we've kind of had a whiteboard session about of finding ways to define seniority at your stores based on merit of getting the job done instead of seniority of how long you've been here. Very interesting. The EV discussion's very interesting to me. We have a couple of Tesla chargers — always people there. And yeah, it goes from convenience to stop and stay a while, but ever since COVID, I just see more and more traffic on those EV chargers and more things happening. Maybe discussion on ways to offer the EV guests a better experience other than, you know, seeing some of them taking a nap. You see some of them standing outside, that kind of thing.

Ed Collupy Got it. Ray?

Raymond Huff I'm thinking of — and I don't know if this even exists — effective dashboarding. I heard multiple things from all the people, but as an owner, I really want to see on one dashboard all of those issues. Be it service issues, loyalty issues, fueling issues. I don't have any fuel, but just all the stuff that actually happens in a store and then applying AI to this to say, OK, what's the most important thing that's going to make us the biggest bang for the buck? Because right now we sort of go after whatever we think we can fix fairly quickly.

Ed Collupy Excellent. Anytime IoT comes up, I'm always thinking about how we don't need, as Steve just posted, multiple dashboards for all the different IoT devices that we have in stores. Dozens and dozens of them with all their own dashboards. There needs to be one pane of glass. But very good. Robert?

Robert Hampton Ed, you know me, I'm always a little off the wall. I'd like to hear either from a futurist that looks out in our industry five years or so to talk about things just to spark ideas. I'm also interested in connected car and if there's anything regarding that because I keep hearing more and more about it and more car manufacturers are adding it. So those are two things. And then to chime in on the EV topic, I've heard, and I don't know if this is the right number, but I I've heard the number of basically an $84 basket size is what a convenience retailer needs to break even by having an EV charger. And so how does that play into our strategy of deploying EV chargers? Because not many of us are going to have $84 baskets. And the other thing I keep hearing is 80% to 90% of charging by most EV vehicle users will happen either at work or home. And again, how does that play into our industry with 150,000 locations, how many locations do we really need? Maybe it's only the highway ones or I don't know, but some clarification around that in the EV world would be good.

Ed Collupy Got it. Sorin?

Sorin Hilgen I kind of share with Janeth what she was saying is next-gen retail technology [getting off of legacy systems] I think Ed you had mentioned the business being more agile and how it's kind of hard to support and be nimble while you have all of this legacy technology. And then the other part of it as we're introducing all of these technologies, I think Donnie, you mentioned it, a way to simplify the integration across all this technology in the store. Those are two topics that I think would certainly be of interest.

Ed Collupy	And that begins to fit with what I think Erin was mentioning about integrating even the functions within an app to get down to that and the whole integration there. Go ahead, Nick.
Nick Peters	In regard to AI applications with the conversation around ChatGPT and all that, I'm really interested to see the practicality when it comes to language normalization, when it comes to report running, building upon the dashboards. One of the things that kind of appeals to me is, we have three analysts here at our organization because people don't want to take the time to go through the complexity of building reports in different ways. And so being able to use normalized language to be able to run reports might be something of interest I'd like to see.
Ed Collupy	Excellent. Very good. And last but not least, Steve.
Steve Morris	[laugh], I give two thumbs up with Raymond and the dashboard, and it's not just for the operational aspects but including sales from back office. So back office technology is certainly something that I would like to hear a little bit more of how we're integrating that into all aspects of operations. Because going last means I get to hear everybody else, so, I love Raymond's idea, I love a bunch of ideas, the dashboard. I also think workforce, I think that that was a conversation that came up. I would like to see more about how technology is being used to effectively manage workforce — for employees and for the employers from that standpoint. And meanwhile, not that I wasn't paying 100% attention, but CSP did just release a note that AmazonGo is closing eight additional stores while stopping their grocery store rollout. So, to have somebody from Amazon explain to us why the tech giant of the world is slowing their roll on retail brick and mortar would be a great get for this group.
Sorin Hilgen	That's because they realize retail is hard.
Steve Morris	Yeah.
Ed Collupy	[laugh] It's a really interesting point because I know I sat in a couple of sessions at NRF, and I can't remember, Myra, if you were there with me or not for this one, but one of the speakers said, "I started my business as an e-commerce vendor, but I would not be surviving today if I weren't in the brick-and-mortar business." So, it's an interesting question, Steve, for sure. But thank you all. I want to turn it over for just a couple minutes to let Roy wrap us up this afternoon. But I really want to thank you all for participating. Let's plan to stay in touch. I hope I get the opportunity to network with many of you

over the next several months even before June in some manner, shape or form at a conference or some other webinar. Roy's going to tell us about the Vision Network's Twist messaging channel and how that can be used a little bit to help us keep in touch with each other between meetings. Our next meeting is going to be on Friday, June 2nd. We'll meet again on Friday, September the 8th, and then again on Wednesday, December 6th. Thanks for all your comments and insights and making our first Convenience Tech Vision Group what it was today. Roy.

Roy Strasburger Absolutely. This is a most excellent meeting today. Myra, Eva, Ed and myself all thank you very, very much for your participation. Ed mentioned Twist. Twist is a Slack-like program which we're going to use as a private channel for the members of this group to communicate with each other and to post relevant information. We will be sending you some information very shortly about how you access it and it's completely voluntary, but we wanted a way to be able to archive and share information that the group might find interesting. So we'd love to make that available to you as one of the side benefits of what we're doing here.

And just to finish rounding it out, the conversations we've had have been fantastic. This is a very general topic type meeting today. We are, as Ed said, looking forward to having very specific topics in the future to talk about and to develop and to dive deeply into.

But I think everything that we talked about today comes back to the point that back in the day, we are the people who defined what convenience meant in the convenience industry. It was the equipment we put out, it was the products that we offered. It was where we located our stores. Today with the advent of the smartphone, it is the customer who is defining what convenience is and we are now playing catch up with them because not everybody's pegged into their own little silos anymore. A convenience customer is still a customer of the pharmacy, customer of the grocery store, customer of Amazon. And that is setting the expectation levels. And so we have to play the game in a way that allows us to compete with all of those people in expectations. I think this is going to be a great forum to do that.

Each of you are here because you were specifically invited to join us and you were invited because you are engaged in the industry and you are engaging people. And that is what's very evident about what we went through today with everybody participating. So I really do appreciate it. And once again, to go back to our mission: it's to share information with others who cannot be on this call and basically don't have access to the resources that we all have. And somebody mentioned Annie Gauthier a little bit earlier at St. Romain Oil in Louisiana. In our last meeting, she had a comment that really resonated with me saying that her company, which has about 25 sites, does not have the scale to fail. They have to understand the business that they're getting into. They have to be very careful about what resources they dedicate to it and they need help in the learnings and the experience from others who've had those experiences.

And that's what we're about, to help everybody be better retailers and helping the industry as a whole. It's educational, it's knowledge sharing and it's a community building exercise. So thank you very much for everything that you do. Ed, you did an excellent job of facilitating today. Thank you everyone for participating and we look forward to our next call. And as Myra mentioned, within the next couple of months we will have the Vision Report out for you to see the results from this meeting and for us to build upon next meeting. So Eva, did you have something you wanted to add?

Eva Strasburger Yes, I was just going to add that the next Vision Report, which comes from the Convenience Leaders Vision Group, is about EV charging [**The Business Case for EV Charging Vision Report** was released in March 2023]. There is a presentation in it from Chris Nordh who knows a lot about EV charging, who's an expert on it, and you'll be able to read the discussion we had, which addresses all of this. But that's not to say we wouldn't discuss it at a CTVG meeting because you'll have your own questions but it's a good base to start. Therefore, look out for that report. It should be out in the next couple of weeks.

Roy Strasburger Which is part of our knowledge sharing mission. That's what we're here for. Everybody benefits. So thank you very much everyone. Ed, I'll leave it to you to say your last goodbyes and everybody have a great weekend.

Ed Collupy Yes. The weekend is upon many of us that are at least here on the East Coast. For West Coast friends you know you have a few more hours to go, but enjoy the weekend and thank you again so much for making today a great kickoff meeting. Thank you.

The **Convenience Technology Vision Group** (CTVG) brings together invited tech leaders for quarterly virtual meetings to discuss technology issues impacting the convenience channel. The group will address trends, challenges and solutions in AI, computer vision, alternative payments, robotics, IoT, blockchain, cybersecurity, data analysis, EVs, food tech, frictionless checkout, digital experiences, workforce management and more. The group is committed to sharing its views and perspectives in order to advance the convenience retailing and mobility industry. CTVG operates under the Vision Group Network, which gathers the collective knowledge and ideas of its members to create a legacy of sharing within the retail community. For more information and to sign up for future Vision Reports, visit our website: **tvgsolutions.com/CTVG**

CTVG
CONVENIENCE TECHNOLOGY
VISION GROUP

A part of Vision Group Network

For more information about Vision Group Network email us:

Myra Kressner
myra.kressner@tvgsolutions.com

Eva Strasburger
eva.strasburger@tvgsolutions.com

Roy Strasburger
roy.strasburger@tvgsolutions.com

Want more?

Access the growing library of Vision Reports at **tvgsolutions.com**

Currents of Change

CLVG Convenience Retailing Vision Report

Vol. 1, January 2023

Key topics covered: changing work schedules and the gig economy; foodservice tipping in the convenience segment; alternative fuels and the timeframe for electric vehicles

The Business Case for EV Charging: Is It for You?

CLVG Convenience Retailing Vision Report

Vol. 2, March 2023

Key topics covered: the pace of EV adoption; c-store operators' views of the EV-charging customer; three pathways of EV retailing; a micro case study