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Convenience stores lure customers inside

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Anchorage, Alaska - Convenience stores may have made things too convenient for the consumer, allowing them to pay outside and never having to go inside the store. So now they're using new strategies to get you back inside after paying at the pump.

There's something new at the pump. No, not just higher gas prices, but a rewards program at Holiday is aiming to get consumers back inside.

"If you can hear about what's on the inside and don't have to go inside to check and know what's in there, you'll know 'I need to go in and get me a sandwich,' where most people don't realize that the station has a little bit of everything," said Charles Elmore, Holiday customer.

At first it was just quick messages flashed on this display, advertising special deals found beyond the pump. But that didn't really grab the preoccupied consumer's attention. And there's more.

"If you're a prepaid customer, you're not going to have to go in anymore. You're just going to come here and you're going to swipe your tag," said Carl Smith, Holiday district manager.

Smith says it's all part of the Big Honkin' Rewards Program -- a way to reward loyal customers with points for purchases while making the transaction for cash customers much easier.

"It will recognize you as a rewards customer and then you'll begin pumping without prepaying and then you can go inside and then finish your transaction at that time without having to go in and prepay and then come back out, fuel and go back inside," said Smith.

While luring customers inside to actually shop.

"If they're using their credit card outside they don't want to come back in," said Kristi Callahan, Holiday cashier.

It eliminates that impulse buying which is a huge part of retail sales. Once customers are inside they usually browse and buy -- something Holiday hopes the new program will incite.

"It's going to be busy for first couple of weeks, at least," said Callahan.

For those who don't appreciate this latest addition, there is an option.

"Hit the mute button, 'cause it's obnoxious while I'm filling up gas," said Jake Spohnholz.

But he can still get rewarded without actually listening. Such tactics give customers reasons to actually go inside and shop at convenience stores that have maybe gotten a bit too convenient.

The [Holiday rewards program](#), which starts May 5, will be competing with the ongoing rewards programs now offered by Fred Meyer and Carrs/Safeway. Customers will earn about 10 points per gallon of gas purchased and 20 points for every dollar spent inside the store. Customers can earn free items such as coffee or a soft drink. They can also qualify for random sweepstakes.