

Understanding Digital 'Center Store' Shopping Habits

Article

Online grocery categories can be divided into two camps: perishable items like meat, dairy and produce and the so-called center store products—peanut butter, tomato sauce, dishwashing detergent—that have longer shelf lives.

While supermarket sites might lump these items together, online retailers often make distinctions a la [Amazon Fresh](#) vs. [Amazon Prime Pantry](#) and [Jet.com](#) and its fresh food

subcategory that's available in select ZIP codes. Fresh food often has delivery surcharges because milk and eggs need to arrive same-day and can't be shipped using typical postal channels.

Because of this, consumer packaged goods (CPG) are closer to traditional ecommerce products that shoppers are familiar with, so it would stand to reason that online grocery shoppers are more comfortable buying these items compared with perishables.

Field Agent surveyed US online grocery shoppers in August 2018 after they made a minimum \$30 purchase either for delivery or pickup and found exactly this. Fully 63% had bought center store groceries during that shopping session. Dairy and eggs (38%), meat (29%) and fresh produce (29%) had lower purchase levels.

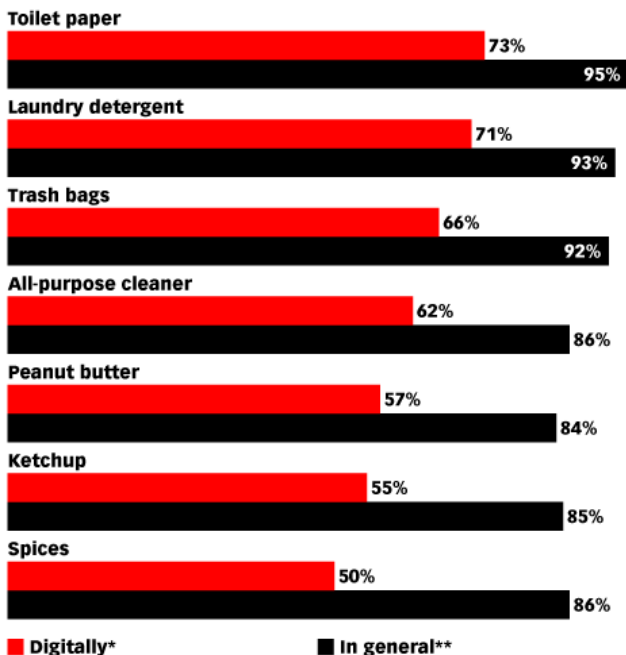
This pattern also held in "The eMarketer Ecommerce Insights Survey" conducted by **Bizrate Insights** in July 2018. The most commonly bought grocery items purchased online by US internet users were candy and snacks (17.5%) and dry food goods (17.2%). Fresh meat and poultry (9.0%) and seafood and fish (4.1%) were less popular.

When asked by Field Agent which categories were easiest to shop for online/in-app, 49% cited center store groceries. Only 5% said meat was easiest to shop for digitally. Center store groceries also had the largest number of shoppers saying that they bought more online than they would have in-store (19%). The top reasons given were because center store groceries are easier to shop for online (58%), they saw items they wouldn't have in-store (23%) and that the prices online were better (19%).

But it doesn't appear that center store groceries are being bought online at the same rate as in-store. There was a gap when comparing behavior between online and in-store grocery shoppers. For example, toilet paper was the leading product bought by all shoppers, but there was a 22-percentage-point difference between in-store and online.

Which Products Do US Grocery Buyers Purchase Digitally* vs. in General**? Aug 2018

% of respondents



Note: n=2,981 who own a smartphone; read as 73% of digital grocery buyers have purchased toilet paper digitally while 95% of total grocery buyers have purchased toilet paper via any method; *among the 1,283 respondents who have purchased groceries digitally; includes online and in-app purchases; **includes in-store, in-app and online
Source: Field Agent, "Categorically Speaking: Center Store Goods in the Omnichannel Age," Aug 21, 2018

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This was true for regularly used items like laundry detergent to less frequently bought items like canned tuna. Most online CPG shoppers don't exclusively buy these products digitally.

It's rare for online buyers to **purchase digitally all the time**, so there is still room for retailers to employ initiatives to increase frequency. Field Agent asked online grocery shoppers which tactics would be "very effective" in motivating them to buy more center store items online. Accepting manufacturer coupons was No. 1, cited by 49% of respondents. Offering prices available in a retailer's weekly ad was next (34%), followed by and a section on the website showcasing deals (34%).