

Mobility Plaza®

Q&A with Linnea Geiss (PDI Technologies): "Retailers can't leave EV consumers on an island"

As the fuel and convenience retail industry continues to navigate the transition from internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles to electric vehicles (EVs), operators must weigh the potential impacts on their sites. PetrolPlaza spoke to Linnea Geiss, COO of PDI Technologies, to discuss how operators can better manage this transition.



Q. How are convenience retailers feeling about the state of the energy transition?

A. I think it's human nature to view any transition or change as a challenge, but I think it's helpful to view this transition as a unique opportunity that will play out for several years. EVs are garnering a lot of headlines — and rightly so — because of their rapid market growth.

People naturally get excited about anything new, but the practical realities are revealing some clarity about how soon we'll see a full transition from ICE vehicles to EVs. In fact, the latest global forecasts show that ICE vehicles will continue to make up half the vehicles on the road until the 2040s.

Of course, some regions — including Europe — are experiencing much faster EV adoption rates. But, to properly manage the energy transition, we'll need better operating models and technologies across the entire ecosystem.

Q. What should retailers be doing differently?

A. It starts with understanding the market trends, especially from a local perspective. You need to know what's happening in your region and what your customers are doing in terms of EV adoption. In many ways, it's just common sense, because the most innovative operators are continuously adapting their sites to keep up with changing consumer behaviors. EVs are just another element to consider, although they're a pretty significant element.

Even if EV consumers' needs and behaviors deviate from what we already know about petroleum consumers, the primary concept of the c-store ecosystem is still built around offering a variety of products and services that consumers can access quickly and conveniently. That aspect doesn't change.

Q. Have you discovered any unique characteristics or behaviors associated with EV drivers?

A. Early adopters tend to be more economically affluent, especially with the average price of EVs today. They also tend to have the infrastructure to charge their cars where they reside. However, as the penetration of EVs continues to grow, more consumers will need easier access to public charging infrastructure. C-stores are a natural place to offer that service.

The obvious difference between petroleum fill-ups and EV charging is the longer wait times associated with charging. That means retailers essentially have a customer who will be on their site longer. They'll need to find ways to get them into the store, where they might want a comfortable place to sit down and have a snack, access a clean bathroom, or do more shopping than they normally would when they're in a hurry.



Linnea Geiss, Chief Operating Officer at PDI Technologies | © PDI Technologies

Q. How is PDI helping retailers implement those types of changes?

A. First of all, we're really excited about all the technology needed to support the energy transition. We're examining the impacts on everything from loyalty solutions to payment applications to dynamic pricing algorithms. For instance, how do the logistics of price optimization differ from EV charging versus fuel fill-ups?

Retailers are always telling us that they want to elevate their customer experience, but they also want a better experience in regard to the technology solutions they use. There's a lot of complexity associated with managing multiple types of EV charge points and figuring out the best way to engage with EV consumers.

Who are they, what attracts them to a site, and how do their site visits differ from traditional

petroleum customers? Retailers can't leave EV consumers on an island from a data perspective. They need to understand those consumers better and make sure they can provide more personalized and compelling promotions, rewards programs, or loyalty offers based on their unique needs.

Q. Are these types of offerings available to retailers today?

A. Yes, retailers can already leverage many of these offerings for multiple purposes. One thing we've seen is that there's more interest in sustainability in general — including from petroleum consumers. For instance, retailers can offer loyalty programs that allow their customers to offset the carbon for the gasoline they purchase. So, even if the customer doesn't drive an EV today, they still have options to reduce their carbon footprint.

Q. What big takeaway do you have in regard to the energy transition?

A. As a company whose mission is connecting consumers and retailers across an increasingly complex convenience ecosystem, PDI sees a lot of great opportunities around the energy transition and EVs in general.

But we're also sensitive about setting the right level of expectation in regard to the timeline of that transition. There's no one-size-fits-all model on how to serve the EV market. With so much growth in the global convenience retail store market, anyone building new sites should plan for EVs. For example, add the required cabling conduit, explore solar canopies on top of charging stations, or experiment with parking configurations.

When you look at the EV adoption curve, we'll likely have petroleum sales for decades into the future. We view our role at PDI as helping retailers start managing the energy transition today while preparing for a future predominantly focused on EVs.

We anticipate a lot of changes unfolding over the next 20 or 30 years, so there's plenty of time to adapt as we go. And we're extremely excited to be right in the middle of it.

At PDI we are helping retailers manage the energy transition today while preparing for an EV-led future. We even have an "EV Hub" with resources and information on [our website](#).