



REBELS, RELIABLES & ROCKSTARS

2017 Annual Movie Theater Concession Spend Survey



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Intro and Methodology

With the rise of internet streaming, theaters are no longer merely a place to see the latest movie but are now places to experience the latest movie. More than ever, it is critical for the moviegoer to have a memorable experience with their friends and family at their local theater.

Movie theaters are taking the food and beverage experience to the next level with the introduction of dine-in movie theaters and reclining seats. But it doesn't make financial sense for every theater to constantly spend money to stay hip with the latest trends. Many theaters must rely on basic concession stands for income. Movie theater concession stands are essential to enhancing the movie going experience.

As we combed through the data, we found three distinct demographic groups. One group spends the most, one bucks the norm and one sticks to traditions.

In the end though, the overall audience view of the concession stand is **74% positive**, meaning most people still stop by to grab snacks for their movie. Guests are even more likely to stop by if incentivized by the promise of a free gift upon arrival.

Even so, did you know **15.9% of moviegoers can imagine a movie without popcorn?**



What we did

We surveyed thousands of moviegoers, from over 3,000 theaters across the United States, about their thoughts on movie theater concession stands. We conducted our survey over 10 days during July, with over **5,000 responses**.

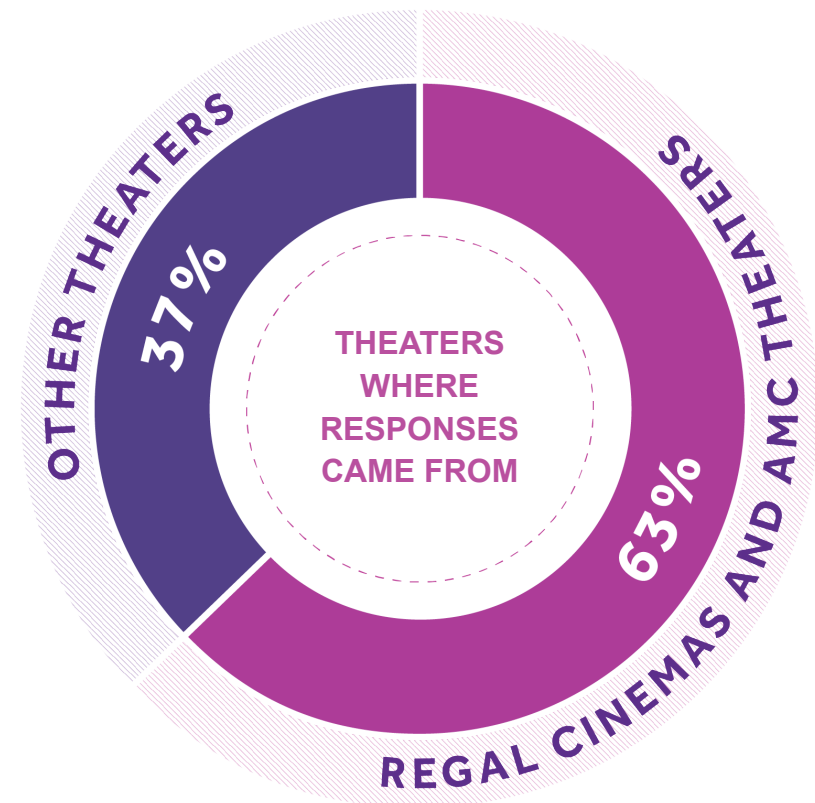
Our data is collected from moviegoers who visited AMC, Cinemark, Regal and all other theaters across the United States. About **63% of our data** came from the top two cinemas, **AMC and Regal**, with 37% coming from the rest of the theaters.

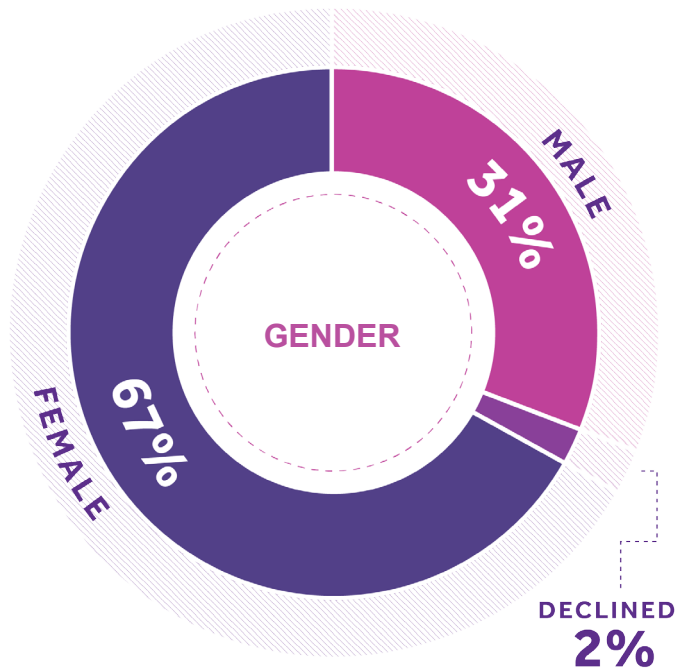
The app recorded the time, date and geo-location of each response to verify accuracy and completeness of the sample. **130 Millennials participated in secondary research** to further examine observations made in the initial survey.

Why we did this

While working with our various movie exhibitor clients, we noticed every theater has its own unique set of challenges. But we also noticed consistent “macro” trends throughout our clients.

We wanted to paint a broad picture of the state of movie theater concession stands across the United States using this data.





Our data covers an array of different movie theater types, from drive-ins to luxury cinemas and everything between.

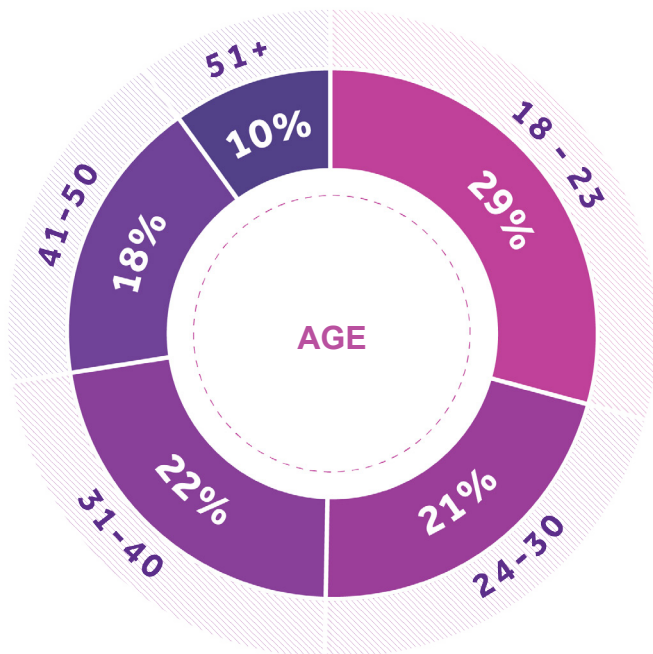
Every cinema should do its own research, but this will give theater owners a benchmark and an idea of national emerging trends.

Who responded

Of the 5,089 moviegoers who responded, **67% of respondents were Female, 31% were Male and 2% declined to answer.** [This lines up with other survey research that states females are more likely to respond to surveys than males.](#)

96% of respondents purchased from a movie theater concession stand during their last three visits. This is important because it verifies we're mostly surveying guests who make purchases from concession stands.

By age, the largest demographic tested were 18 - 23 year olds who, [according to the 2016 Motion Picture Association of America \(MPAA\)](#) reports, have also been the fastest attendee growth demographic since 2012. The graphic above shows the relative breakdown of survey respondents from all participating demographics.



What is real-time feedback and why does it matter?

Real-time feedback is about gathering the feedback in real-time, not seeing the results in real-time.

For example, say you own a movie theater. What data do you think is more valuable, feedback gathered hours or days after the guest leaves the venue or data collected at the point of experience?

You may have guessed it, data gathered at the point of experience is [the most valuable type of feedback](#). This ensures a user's opinions don't change after having spent time away from your business and you can also nip immediate problems in the bud.

Thoughts to keep in mind

For many theaters, the development of concession stands is an on-going process of innovation and modernization. Plus, rules for the tax and sale of alcohol in cinemas varies significantly across the States.

Due to this variation, we intentionally did not distinguish between different types of concession offerings. Results may not be completely accurate for each unique theater, but the methodology used for collecting the data is complete, statistically sound and verifiable.

According to the recorded geo-location of their response, 63% of moviegoers used for this research identified themselves as guests of AMC Theaters & Regal Cinemas. Neither of these companies authorized, participated in or endorsed the collection of data in this report or its findings. No attempt has been made to isolate data for any circuit and/or compare it with company data in the SurveyMe network.

Whereas "per cap" is widely used in the industry, for the purpose of this study we have deliberately focused solely on average spend at the concession, i.e. excluding box office income.

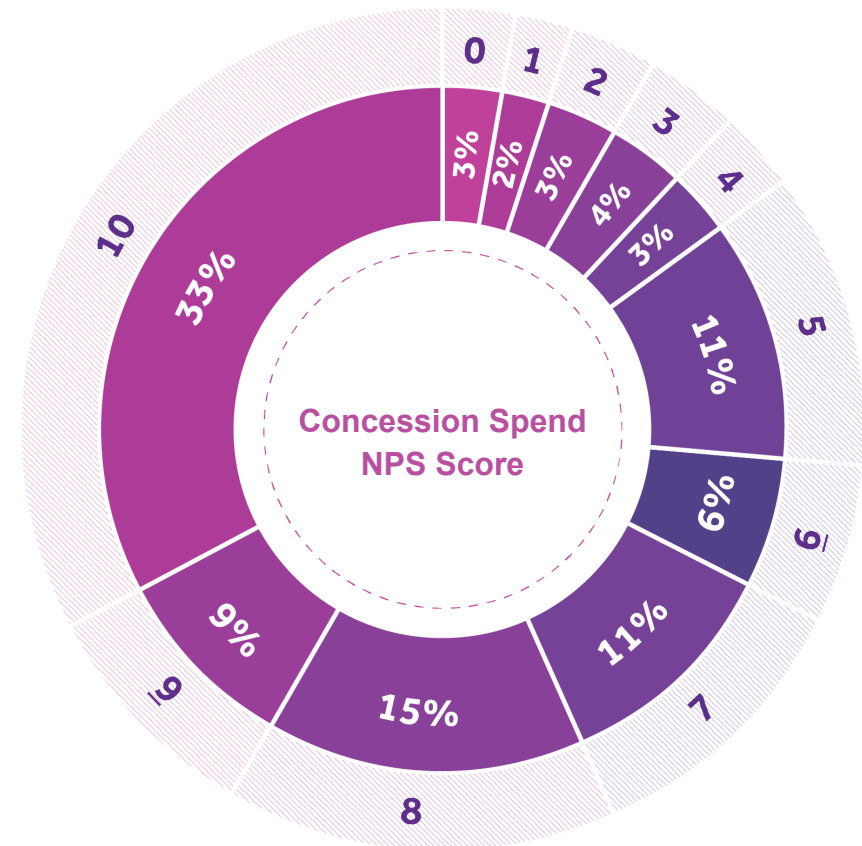


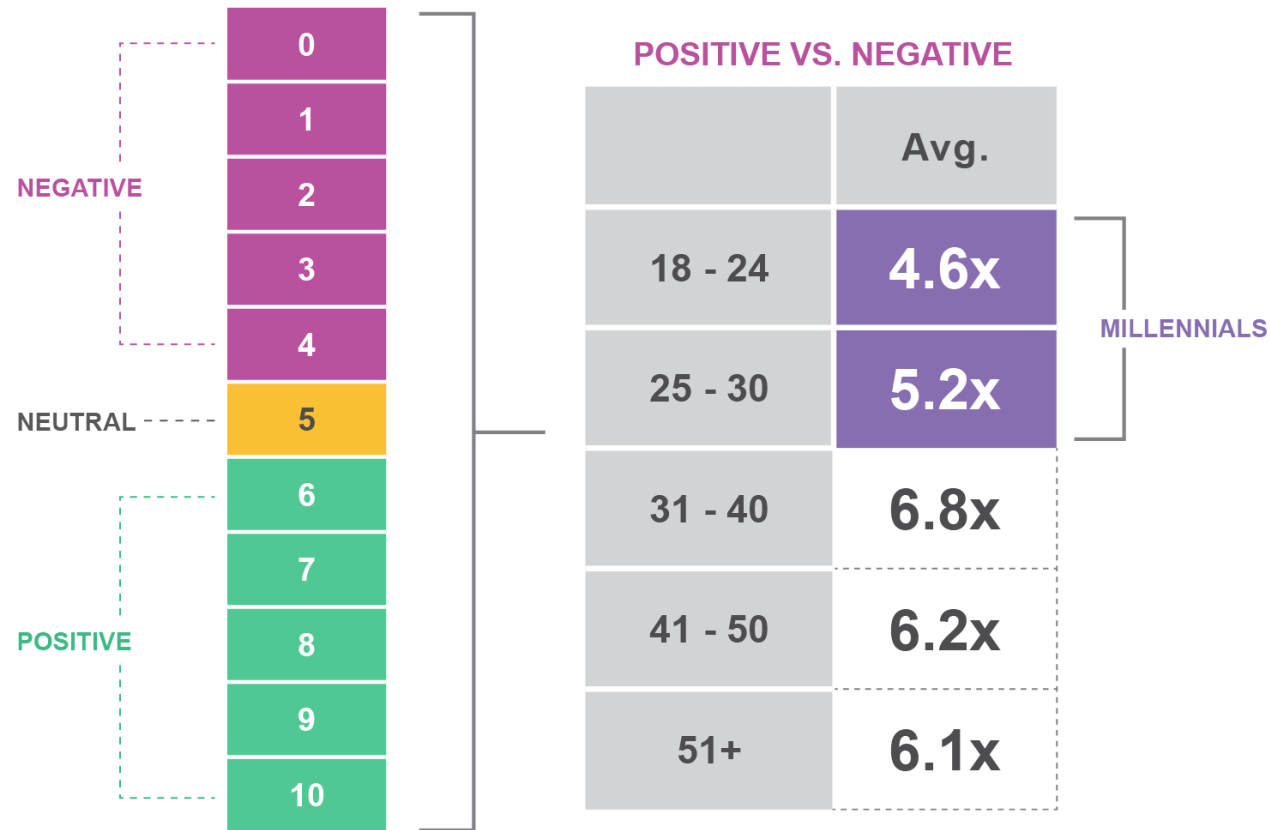
Concession Survey Results

1. How likely are you to make a purchase at the concession stand?

This question was asked with a sliding scale of 0-10 with 0 being “not at all” and 10 being “extremely likely.”

Every theater owner wants to drive customers to the concession stands and we wanted to know the likelihood of an average guest stopping by for a popcorn or soda. According to our survey results, most guests, no matter their gender or age, will stop by the concession stand while visiting a movie theater. **About 33% percent of participants overall said they are “extremely likely” to stop by the concession stand** (giving a rating of 10 out of 10) when visiting their local movie theater.





Guests overall are **4.7 times more positive** (rated between 6 and 10) than negative (rated between 0 to 4) about visiting the concession stand.

Millennials may be to blame. [MPAA released stats in 2016 that stated Millennial \(18 - 24\) movie attendance was up over previous years](#), but according to our findings they have the least desire to visit the concession stand when at the movies.

This bodes well for the motion picture industry, but poorly for movie theaters and their owners. There may be more Millennials heading to the theater, but they are more likely to pass by the concession stand.

Why Millennials are ditching the concession stand needs to be researched on a per theater basis using surveys. It could be a lack of income, it could be they are sneaking food into the theater or they may just find the choices offered at the concession stand unappealing.

We ran a small survey of mostly Southern Californian Millennials to see some of the reasons why they are sneaking in food. This can be found on page 29.

The future isn't all grim though.

Guests between 24 and 30 (technically older Millennials) are **9 times more likely to make a purchase** than their younger counterparts. This may support the conclusion that it could be income preventing young Millennials from spending on concession items.

Overall, guests above 50 years of age **were most likely to make purchases** at the concession stand. Women are overall **2% more likely** to visit a theater's concession stand when visiting a theater than men, but both genders are positive on the NPS scale.

Females between the ages of 31 to 40 are the demographic most likely to purchase an item. They rated their likeliness to visit about **6.8 times more positively** than negatively.

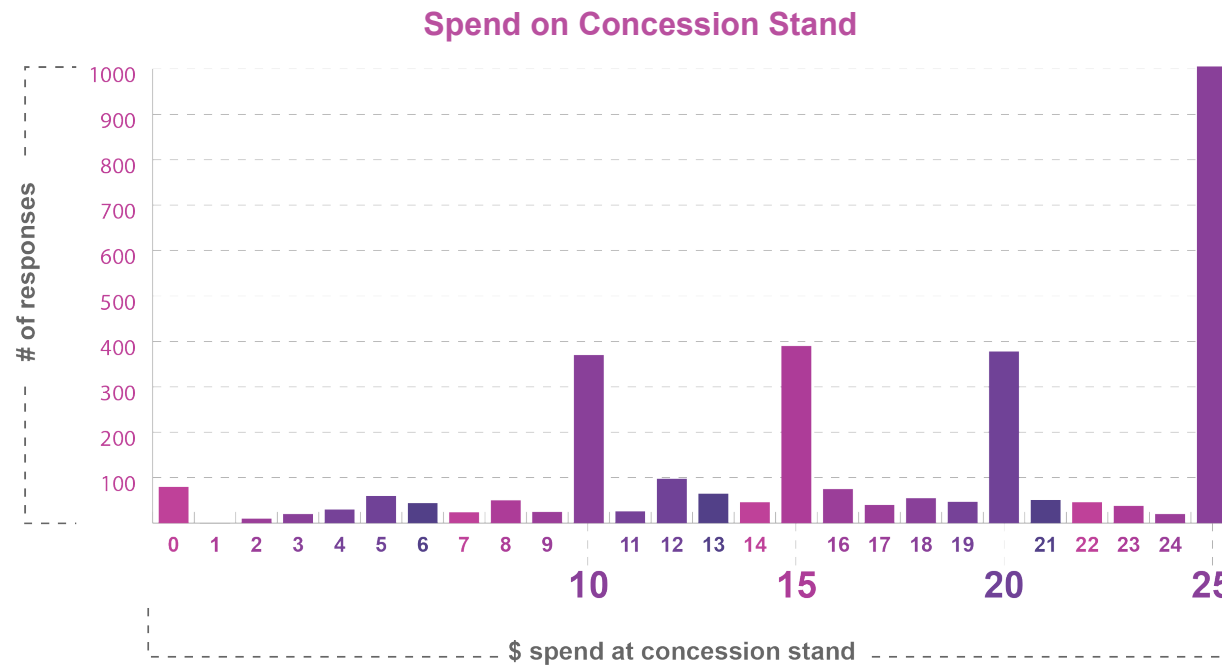
- **Despite last year's growth in theater attendance, young Millennials are the least likely demographic to make a purchase.**
- **Women and patrons between the ages of 31 to 40 are slightly more likely to make a purchase.**
- **Overall a majority of guests will visit the concession stand, but that number is not growing quickly.**
- **The overall general view of the concession stand is still positive (74%)**
- **18 - 23 Millennials are least likely to purchase from the concession stand despite attendance growth**
- **31 - 40 Females are the demographic most likely to purchase from the concession stand**

2. How much do you usually spend at a concession stand?

Before we dive into this data, we surveyed a variety of different movie theater types in various locations all over the United States. This concession survey data is meant to paint a broad picture of the overall spending trends of different demographics across the United States.

We asked this question using a slider between the limit of \$0 and \$25. We capped the spend at \$25 because it is the maximum amount of money someone would spend for three of the largest items. Anyone who purchases more than \$25 we lump them into this group. This way we could use our Enterprise Dashboard Analytics software to analyze trends and clusters.

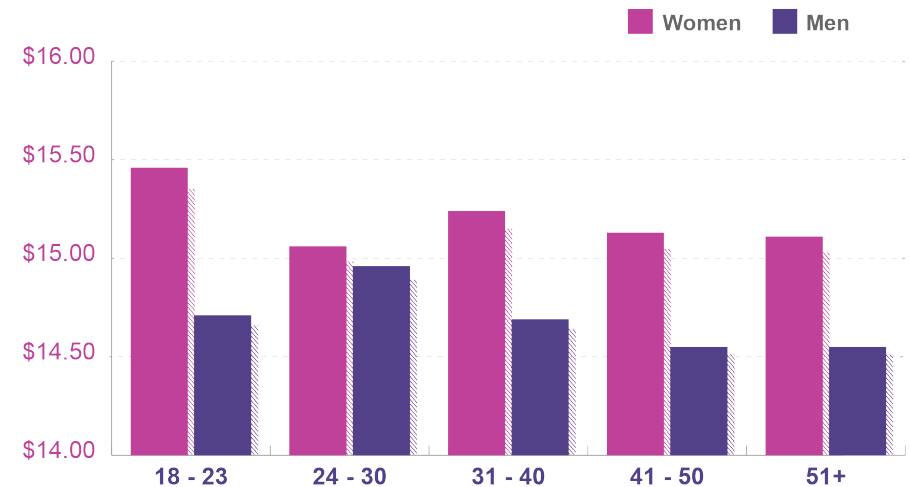
The answers to this question depends on where the theater is located in the United States, but **average spend across all demographics is \$15.06**. We also noticed clusters of spending habits -- clusters such as **\$25 were followed by \$15, \$20, and \$10** each time they visit the concession stand.



Across all age groups Females spend **4% more** at the concession stand than Males. Across all demographics there is only **\$0.91 variance** with average spend. This suggests guests have an amount in mind that they are willing to spend per visit and/or a core preference for certain product combinations, e.g. popcorn and soda.

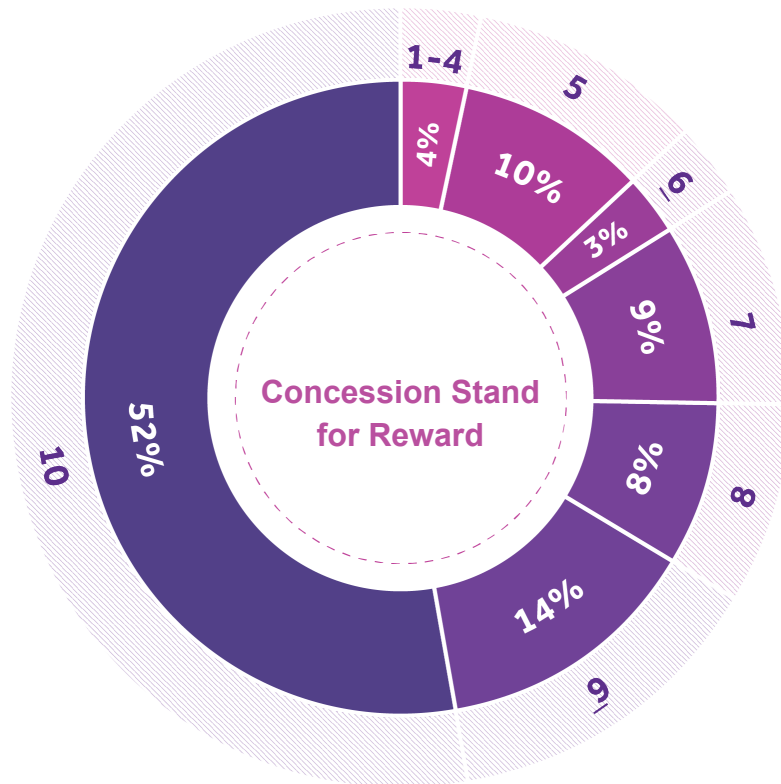
Females 18 - 23 reportedly spend the most at an average spend of **\$15.46** with Females 31 - 40 coming in second at **\$15.08** average spend. Males over the age of 41 spend the least at a mere **\$14.55**.

Concession Stand Gender/Age Breakdown



- Females Millennials (18 - 23) have the highest average spend \$15.48, while Males over 40 have the lowest average spend \$14.55.
- The average money spent each visit at a concession stand is \$15.06

3. How much more likely would you be to visit the concession stand if you were offered a reward?



A vast majority of people said they'd be far more likely to visit the concession stand if there was a reward waiting for them at the end.

The scale was numbered between 0 - 10, with 10 being “**extremely likely**” and 0 being “**not likely at all.**” The average rating across all demographics was **8.48**.

About **52% of guests would say they'd be “extremely likely”** to go to the concession stand if the theater offered a reward for it, such as a cash discount or free popcorn.

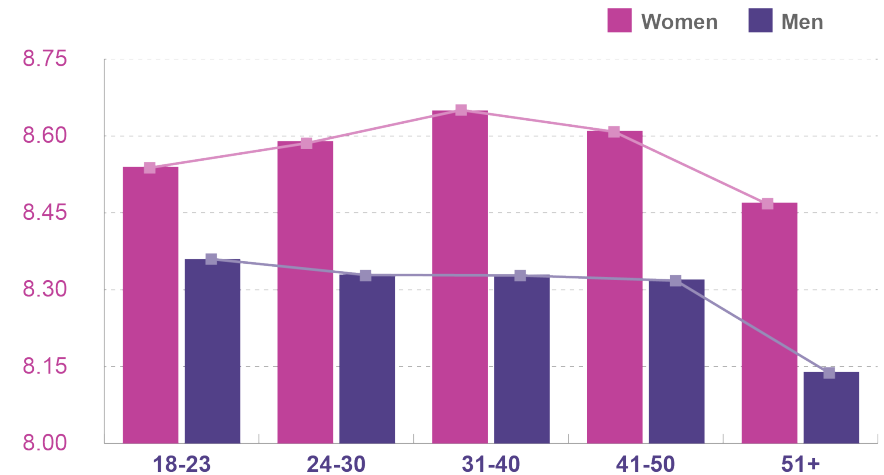
Females are slightly more motivated (8.6) to visit the concession stand when rewarded, than Males (8.3). **Females 31 - 40 are the demographic most likely to be influenced by a reward.**

Remember how Millennials are less likely to head to concession stands? Millennials (8.5) as a whole are actually motivated to visit the concession if rewarded for doing so.

We have known this to be a successful way to drive movie guests to the concession stand due to past experiences. Pearl Theaters uses SurveyMe to offer a free popcorn, no purchase required, as a reward for feedback. The owners don't view the free popcorn as simply giving away an item, but as a way to lure customers to a concession stand and go for the upsell.

Pearl Theaters was able to increase their per cap income from the concession stands by 10% by offering a popcorn size upgrade or an accompanying soda at the time of redemption.

Reward Incentive Gender/Age Breakdown



- Overall, 66% of guests said they would be “extremely likely” (scores 9 & 10) to go to the concession stand if offered a reward.
- Females 31 - 40 are the most likely to be motivated by a reward.
- Millennials are 18% more likely to visit the concession stand when rewarded.

4. Which rewards would motivate you to leave feedback the most?

For this question, customers were able to select multiple answers of their favorite reward. We know rewards drive customers to concession stands, but we wanted to know which reward would most motivate customers to leave feedback. If the reward is good enough for customers to fill out a survey, it can also be used as an excellent generic marketing coupon.

The rewards selections we offered were the following in order of most desired in the table to the right.

Free gift like a small popcorn – no purchase necessary	2877	56%
Free gift with every purchase	2586	51%
Cash discount with minimum purchase	1905	37%
Combo offers	1555	31%
Loyalty Card points	1046	21%
Cash discount coupon for restaurant	934	18%
Cash discount coupon for grocery store	932	18%
Free Exclusive Movie content	866	17%
Percentage discount coupon for grocery store	609	12%
Percentage discount coupon for restaurant	579	11%

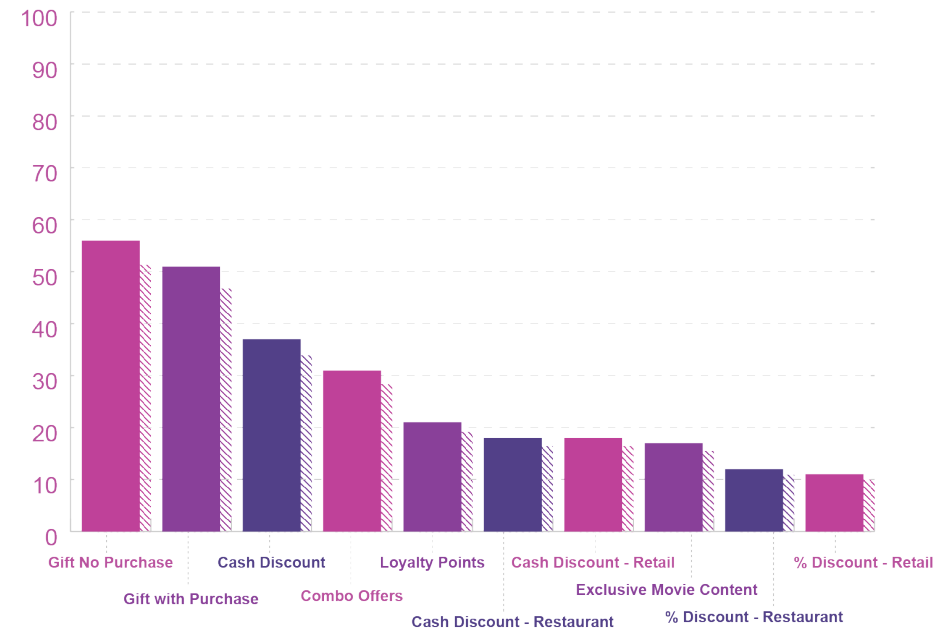
“Free gift without purchase - like a small popcorn” was the most desired type of reward for leaving feedback (57% overall), which comes as little surprise considering how successful Pearl Theaters has been at giving away free popcorn.

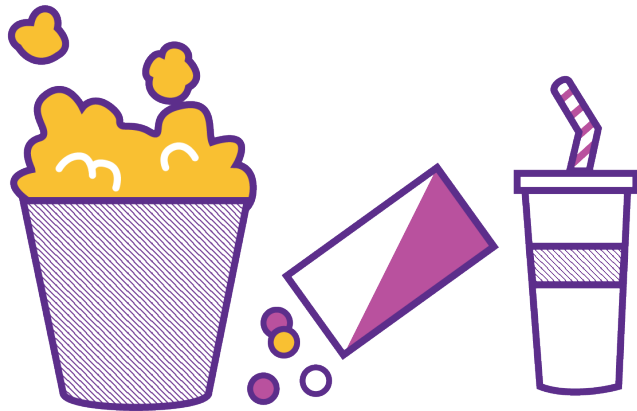
What was surprising is that “free gift with purchase” came in second place with 51%. This could be anything -- from a buy one, get one free offer to a free soft drink with a purchase of a popcorn. It goes to show customers **want to feel like they received an item for free**, even if they have to spend money to get it.

Speaking of which, the third most desired reward was a **cash discount with a minimum purchase**. This is a flat discount and not a percentage. What puts this above a majority of offers is the fact that customers can use it right away and tangibly see the dollar amount they save.

Combo offers, such as “buy a popcorn with a candy and get a drink free,” came in fourth place. This makes sense because the customer is forced to buy multiple items for a small discount instead of receiving an item for “free.” It also may be hard to calculate total combo discounts while trying to still nab a middle seat for a movie.

Which Rewards Motivate Most





The least desirable rewards were exclusive trailers or video clips and discounts for establishments (grocery and restaurant) that are not specifically for the theater. The video clips and bloopers may be more desirable if it was for a movie that was highly sought after such as Star Wars, but generally it will perform poorly.

Customers typically do not want discounts for outside companies, most likely because they have to wait to use it at a business they have no interest in. Sadly because of this, dinner and a movie discounts may become a relic of the past.

This data seems to not vary significantly between demographics, but **83% of men above the age of 50 strongly desired a free item without purchase.** Rewards which give instant gratification are **2.7 times more popular** overall with guests than delayed satisfaction rewards such as loyalty points.

- A free item most effectively motivates customers to leave feedback.
- 51% of respondents said free gift with purchase.
- Rewards with instant gratification are 2.7x more desired than delayed satisfaction rewards like loyalty points.

5. What did you purchase at the theater concession stand on your last three visits?

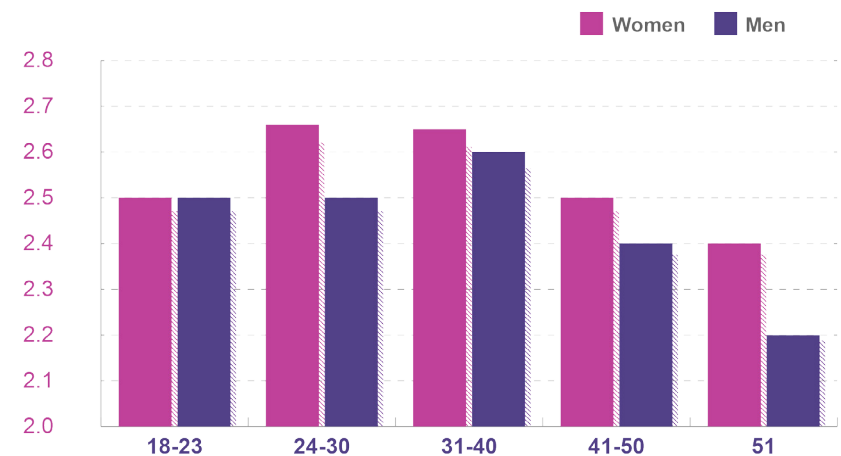
In an attempt to turn the movie going experience into just that, an experience, movie theaters have been upgrading their concession stands to include any snacks, foods and desserts one can think of. But sometimes the old standbys are still the best.

Movies and popcorn are inseparable in the mind of American moviegoers. Out of the 94% of moviegoers who said they made a purchase in their last three visits, **84% of them bought popcorn.**

Across all ages, Males almost always (**99/100**) buy soda when they purchase popcorn.

Soda was a close second at 77% across all demographics. This means for every 100 popcorn purchases there are 95 soda purchases. It's easy to draw the conclusion that salty popcorn may encourage soda purchases. Both of these items are still popular among all demographics and boast particularly high margins.

How Many Items Gender/Age Breakdown





Candy came in third with about one being purchased for every two popcorns. The 51 and over demographic of both genders are least likely to buy candy than any other demographic (**4 in 10 visits**) and over half are as likely to buy candy as they are to buy popcorn (**9.2 in 10**) with soda.

After candy ranked hot dogs (**13% of respondents purchased in last 3 visits**), pizza (**12%**) and ICEE (**12%**) as the next most popular concession items. Interestingly, 18 - 23 Females are the only demographic who purchased more ICEEs (**19%**) than pizza (**13%**) or hot dogs (**12%**).

Guests over 31 are **50% more likely** to buy hot dogs than pizza, but Millennials love pizza! They are **10% more likely** to buy pizza than hot dogs.

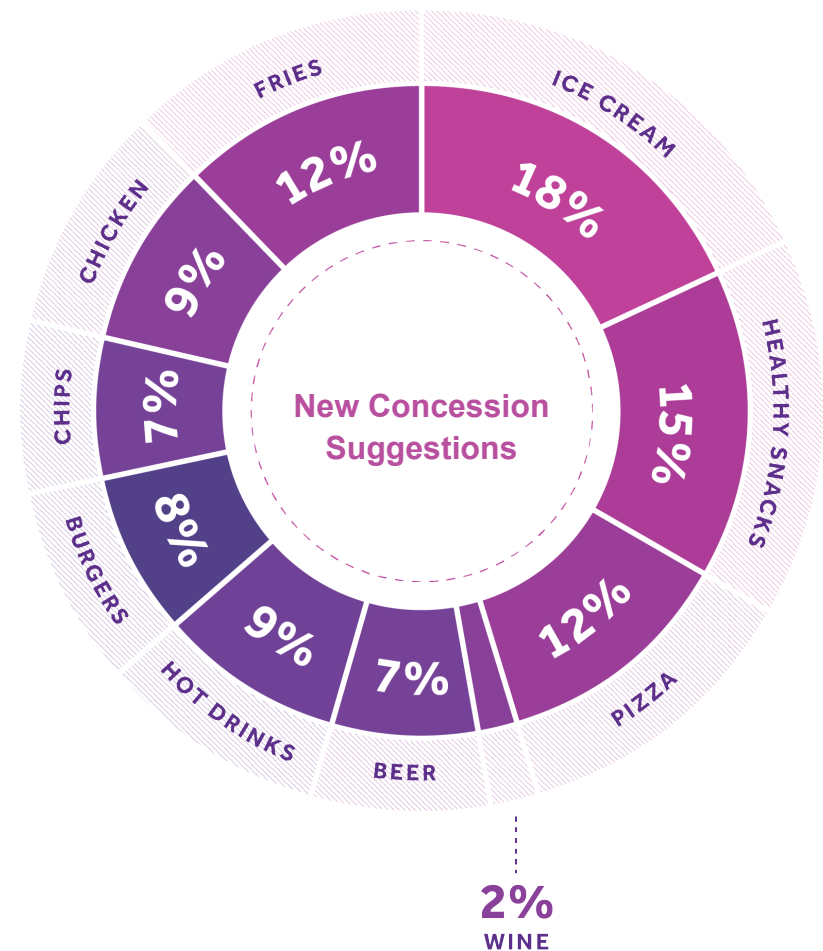
- For every 100 purchases of popcorn there are 95 soda purchases.
- Millennials are 10% more likely to purchase pizza than hot dogs.
- Males aged 24 - 40 most frequently buy alcohol.

6. What one item currently unavailable at the concession stand would you like to see added?

For this question we allowed survey takers to write down any concession item they could think of. Some guests truly let their imagination run wild.

We decided to categorize common items together. Suggestions for popsicles, sorbet and ice cream all fall under “ice cream.” Veggies, fruit, nuts, and generic “healthy food” are categorized as healthy snacks.

Overall, **40 “new” product ideas were suggested**. A majority of the most detailed suggestions came from the 18 - 23 age group (specifically Females). This suggests they are **highly engaged and strong advocates** for innovation at the concession stand.



The older demographic groups are more content with the existing product range (**28% of 51 and over suggest no new products**) versus 18 - 23 (**18%**). 31 - 40 Females gave the most suggestions regarding new product ideas for children.

Ice cream (18%), which is common place in UK cinemas, was the number one suggested item overall. The highest demand for ice cream was by young millennial Females (18 - 23), making up 27% of ice cream responses.

Healthy snacks came in a close second (15%) with the 31 - 40 Female respondents suggesting healthy foods more than any other demographic.



1 in every 2.5 new product suggestions by Females can be categorized as “**fast food.**” For Males, **1 in every 2.2** suggestions could be categorized as “fast food.” Fast food contains foods like burgers, fries, hot dogs and anything else that’s purchasable through a drive-thru.

Pizza was tied equally for 4th place with fries. Highest demand for pizza was 18 - 23 Females (17%) followed by 41 - 50 Females (12%).

Out of wine, cocktails and beer, **beer was the most requested** type of alcohol among all demographics. Wine came in as a close second.



- Ice cream and healthy foods are most in demand across all demographics and especially from Millennials and Females age 24 - 50.
- As a general observation, 1 in every 2.2 Males suggest a fast food category item, such as fries or pizza



Three Notable Demographics

We noticed three distinct groups emerge as we were examining the data. The first group was the infamous **Millennials**.

This demographic of course is known for “killing” almost every industry on the face of the earth and in turn is the subject of almost every business related headline. Joking aside, they have significantly different tastes and life priorities than generations before them.

More importantly, they **rebel** against the norm.

Then we have the **31 - 40 year old Females**. This demographic generally contains the most moms which, as we know from our general survey, are usually key decision makers in the household when it comes to going to the movie theater.

What we also learned is that they are the demographic most likely to visit the concession stand and spend the most at a concession stand.

As cheesy as it may sound, they are concession stand **rockstars**.

Finally, we have the **51 and older crowd**. They don't necessarily spend the most amount of money at concession stands, but they almost always visit them.

They don't demand a fancy concession stand offering every food under the sun because almost every time they go to the movies they only purchase a popcorn and a soda. To them, the movies mean a familiar experience every time.

These are your **reliables**.

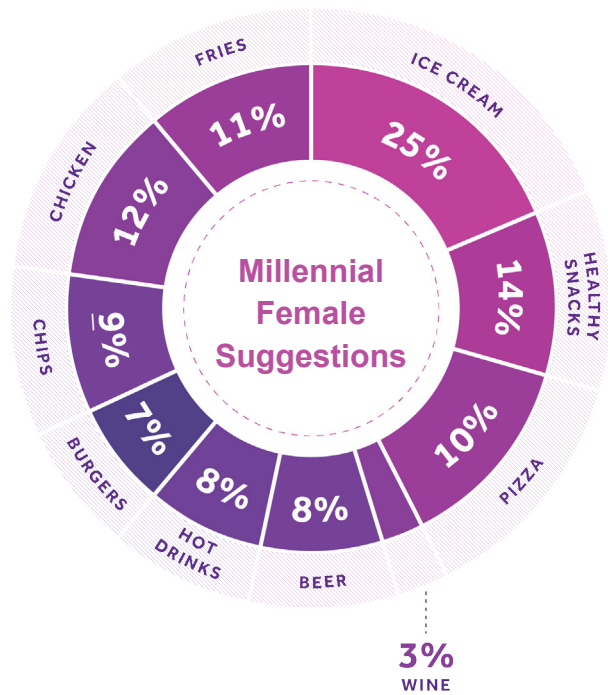
Each of these demographics have their own unique wants and desires about what their movie going experience should be.

Rebels: Millennials (18 - 30)

Rebels are the fastest growing demographic group and are quickly becoming huge spenders, but they are picky about where they spend their money. Generally, they choose not to spend it at the concession stand unless something catches their eye.

Rebels are much more interested in experiences and new types of food than other demographics. Dine-in movie theaters in particular are a good example of a unique movie going experience.



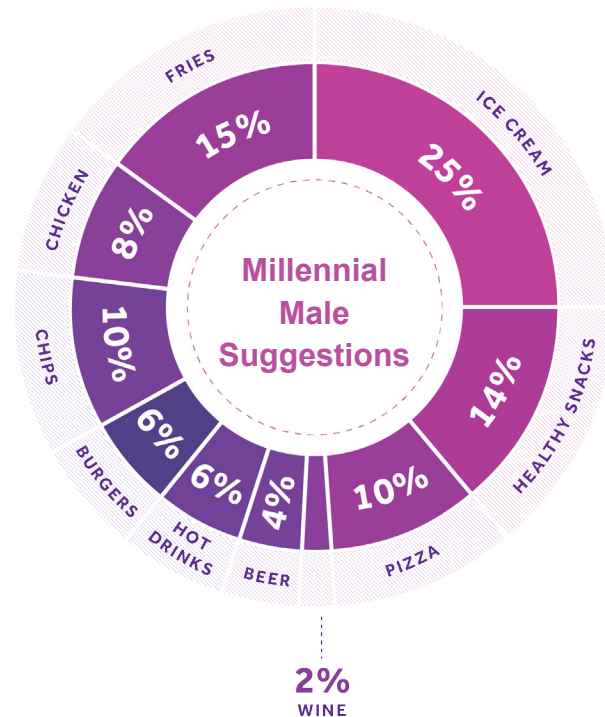


But what Rebels also want is ice cream! **39% of all ice cream responses** across all ages came from 18 - 23 year olds alone. Rebels requested a wide variety of ice cream flavors and types, including items like sorbet and sandwiches.

Pizza was a huge request (**26%**) among young and old Rebels. Rebels listed in detail their desire for a wide range of customizable pizzas.

There were minimal differences between genders as far as a majority of requests go, but there were some key differences once they were broken down. Rebel Females (**6%**) demanded **tea, coffee or other hot beverages**, which was the exact same demand for **alcohol**.

Males (**11%**) were especially inclined to want **fried chicken**, in the form of boneless wings, tenders or nuggets, over Females (**8%**).



But what all Millennials want is the ability to customize their experience their way.

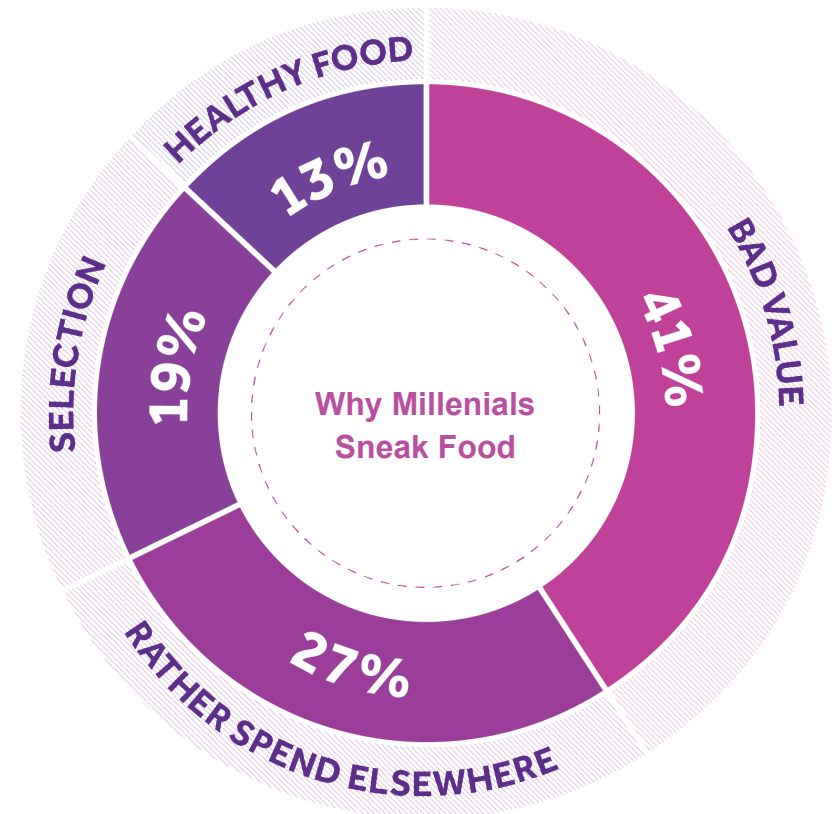
In fact, they'd rather sneak food from outside venues into the movie theater. We ran a smaller anonymous survey about Rebels and their food sneaking habits in and it turns out a whopping **94% of them admitted to sneaking food into the theater.** (from an anonymous survey we later conducted)

75% cited multiple reasons for sneaking food into movie theaters. Among those reasons, **"poor value"** came in first followed by **"want to spend money elsewhere"**.

The overall rationale for Millennials sneaking in food is tough to pin down because each person has their own specific reason and **27% cited only one reason** for sneaking food in. This shows there are multiple factors that influence the decision to not purchase from the concession stand.

Out of those 27%, **56% gave the reason of "poor value."** When two or more reasons were given, 38% cited "poor value."

27% of Rebels combined "poor value" with "want to spend money elsewhere." This is the most frequent combination. Examples of "elsewhere" could be anything, but can be grouped around saving money for other priorities and buying food elsewhere.



Top 10 items snuck into movie theaters:

1. **Candy**
2. **Water**
3. **Healthy snacks**
4. **Fast-casual food (including burgers and burritos)**
5. **Soda**
6. **Chips**
7. **Popcorn**
8. **Alcohol**
9. **Hot beverages**
10. **Ice cream**



Weirdest items:



Noodles



Milk



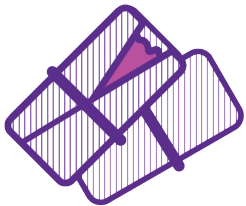
Tacos



Salad



Pickles



Tamales



Fruit



Cheesecake



Smoothies

Rockstars: 31 - 40 year old Females

Rockstars are the demographic most likely to visit your concession stand. On average, they spend the second most amount of money and are the demographic most likely to be influenced by rewards.

It's hip to appeal to the millennial generation, but don't forget the demographic that can make you the most money. Rockstars also contain the majority of the mom population, who are generally the decision makers in the household, based on other surveys we conducted.

They have specific desires not seen in other demographics. Rockstars are the only demographic to prioritize **health food (26%)** over other food categories. **Ice cream (16%)** followed by **nachos (4%)** were next.

Rockstars also had very detailed and lengthy responses when asked about what they wanted to see at a concession stand.



Reliables: 51 and over

These are the group of people who you can rely on to stop by the movie theater. **7 out of 10** Reliables said they'd be likely to visit the concession stand.

85% of the Reliables purchase only popcorn and soda. Only **15%** bought anything other than popcorn and soda.

Reliables also spend the least amount of money on alcohol than any other demographic as they are the most likely to just associate the purchase of popcorn and soda with the movie-going experience.

In fact, **1 in 5 Reliables are content** with the offerings currently at their concession stands. This means they can't think of anything else they would want to enjoy at the movies.

One trend we did notice was the desire for products that enhance their popcorn and drink experience. We saw suggestions for **different popcorn flavorings** and varieties like **air-popped corn**.

Interestingly, we saw fruit juice as a highly suggested alternative to soda. Other ideas included footlong chili dogs and string cheese.

Reliables are also highly motivated by rewards to visit the concession stand and **83% of Males** are particularly influenced to visit if offered **free popcorn seasonings**.





Conclusion

We hope that this research has provided some food for thought!

Overall our study suggests, regardless of age or gender, moviegoers are willing to engage with exhibitors to improve their overall guest experience and this includes concessions. We've highlighted Females aged 31 to 40 as being the "surprise" Rockstar demographic exhibitors should focus on besides simply Millennials. We've suggested those over 50 are also the most reliable spenders at the concession stands and minimal tweaks will future-proof that income source.

Keep in mind, to get the most accurate picture of your own guest's views of your concession stand, you need to run your own customer surveys. Once you see the concession experience through the eyes of these guests, endless opportunities will open up.