

# New mystery shop survey rates convenience stores

**Beth Phillips**

The Grocer has launched a mystery shopping survey for the convenience sector.

As part of The Grocer's new-look Independent View section, the mystery shop benchmarks independents against symbol groups, co-ops, discounters and the multiples' convenience formats in the same area. The mystery shop, by field marketing agency FM&CG, rates five c-stores in a single area on five criteria:

availability, customer service, services such as ATM and top-ups, and community facilities.

The final criteria will change every month, with this week's mystery shop testing the availability of environmentally friendly products to coincide with The Grocer's Green Issue.

In future months, the shop will test availability of on-trend items such as fresh produce, local products and seasonal goods. It will also include a price

comparison, but the scores will not be determined by price. "We haven't shirked the issue of price, but like-for-like comparisons are impossible," said Adam Leyland, editor of The Grocer. "Besides, in convenience, it's not just about price. Our scoring system reflects that."

The Co-operative Group triumphed in the first survey, but Jones Convenience Store came a close second.

*Independent View p56*

## INDEPENDENT VIEW

## THE GREEN ISSUE

### MYSTERY SHOP

## A bag for life: that would be nice

How committed are convenience retailers to the environment? In the first of our new mystery shopping surveys on the convenience sector, **Jason Evans** visited Bristol to find out.

It's not easy being green if you're a convenience retailer. Whether you're backed by a giant multiple, or a lone-some independent, the limited range means the decision to stock 'environmentally friendly' products can be high risk. But since everyone agrees the planet is under greater long-term threat from global warming than the currently ailing economy, we used our new mystery shop to test out convenience retailers.

In addition to 10 core convenience items (see p6), we shopped for five green products - a low-energy light bulb, recycled toilet paper, a bag for life, an environmentally friendly washing powder or liquid and a pack of four rechargeable batteries.

The shop was a resounding corroboration of The Co-op's commitment to the environment, stocking all five items. The Aldi also performed well. The Tesco Express, on the other hand, stocked just two of the five products - not much better than Jones, the Bitton-based independent, although Tesco's bags for life were easily the cheapest.

Availability across the core convenience items was strong for all the retailers, although Aldi was out of milk. On customer service, standards were again high, with Tesco standing out for its speedy response to a lengthening queue, with a staff member volunteering to help the shopper as he examined the washing range.

By comparison, the Aldi shop was short-staffed, with a lengthy queue developing, even though it wasn't particularly busy. And this new store (which replaced an old Somafield building) was also cluttered with stock piled high in cardboard boxes or on pallets in the narrow aisles.

The worst service was experienced at McColl's. It lacked availability on the green products, staff seemed uninterested in helping our shopper. In marked contrast the ladies at Jones Convenience Store could not have been more helpful or friendly. ■



### STORE FACTS

**Town:** Bitton (near Bristol)  
**Opened:** 1911  
**Local rivals:** Tesco Express (1.8 miles) and Asda (2.7 miles)

This shop was conducted by FM&CG, a field marketing agency which provides training, research, merchandising, compliance, data capture and mystery shopping services to grocers and FMCG companies. For more information visit [www.fmandcg.co.uk](http://www.fmandcg.co.uk) or call 01793 829196.

The Field Marketing Consultancy Group

### INTERVIEW JULIE ELLIOTT, MANAGER, JONES CONVENIENCE STORE, BITTON

#### Tell us a bit about your shop

The shop has been here since 1911. It's part of a chain of independents in the West Country. This is the only shop in the village, although there's a Tesco and a big Asda in Longwell.

#### How have you adapted to competition?

When the Post Office closed, we introduced more stationery and stamps. We survive by being part of the community. Knowing our customers is important. We have feedback forms that we can send back to our head office if customers ask for something we haven't got.

#### Are you happy with the number of deliveries you get?

As part of a chain, we do have set lines, but we are able to give feedback to head office.

We receive deliveries several times a week - daily with our freshly baked goods, with other goods twice a week. Our suppliers are good. They have helped us stock a wide range of products, and this helps us serve our community.

#### You don't seem to stock many green products? Why is that?

We would like to sell a bag for life. It's a good idea. We have tried our best to sell as many green products as we can and with the feedback of our customers, we will continue.

#### Do you feel you have the right tools for the job?

We have services such as top-up, lottery, Billpay (where people can pay a lot of different types of bills) and fresh goods on our Bake & Bite counter. We don't have email yet but it is coming

shortly with our till upgrade.

We also have cameras in the store which feed back to our head office so they can watch what is going on.

#### Any frustrations?

Apart from the economy, our problem here is the parking: only a small amount of space at the front and no car park in the village. When people are driving past and see us and want to stop, they don't fit in the space at the front of the shop already has cars parked. There may be a building knocked down at some point to make way for new homes, which may help.

#### Any good news?

The fact we are getting new tills that poll every night. This will be most helpful, although it will take some getting used to, as it is a computer system.

## PRICE & AVAILABILITY CHECK

	TESCO EXPRESS	ALDI	MCCOLL'S	CO-OP	JONES C-STORES
<b>Sliced white bread</b> cheapest brand, 800g *1	0.72	0.85	1.35	1.24	1.15
<b>Milk</b> semi-skimmed, 1-pint	0.42	0.05	0.69	0.49	0.52
<b>Banana</b> each *2	0.18	0.12	0.38	0.24	0.26
<b>Painkiller</b> cheapest brand, 8-pack *3	0.36	0.24	2.25	0.20	0.49
<b>Coke or cola</b> , cheapest, 500 ml *4	0.94	1.49	1.10	1.05	1.00
<b>Walkers crisps</b> , cheapest standard packet, 34.5g *5	0.40	0.12	0.46	0.39	0.42
<b>Water</b> cheapest, 500ml *6	0.38	0.39	0.87	0.47	0.59
<b>Mars Bar</b> standard *7	0.41	0.39	0.48	0.46	0.45
<b>Filter coffee</b> cheapest, 227g packet *8	2.25	1.29	DNS	2.09	2.59
<b>Catfood</b> Whiskas pouch or cheapest brand *9	0.28	0.34	0.50	0.39	0.40
<b>GREEN PRODUCTS</b>					
<b>Low energy light bulb</b> Low energy, bayonet *11	DNS	0.99	DNS	1.49	DNS
<b>Toilet paper</b> recycled, 4-pack *12	DNS	DNS	2.49	1.99	DNS
<b>Bag for life</b> each *13	0.20	0.79	DNS	0.99	DNS
<b>Washing powder or liquid</b> natural ingredients, cheapest *14	2.79	2.19	2.79	2.29	2.75
<b>Rechargeable batteries</b> AA, 4-pack	DNS	2.99	DNS	5.98	DNS

**Notes:** The mystery shop took place on 11 September 2008 in Bristol. The final five products are selected on the basis of the theme of the month - in this case green products. \*1 Bread: McColl's = Kingsmill; Co-op = Hovis; \*2 Bananas: Aldi's price based on a bunch of 7 priced 85p; McColl's price based on bunch of 3 at £1.15; Co-op price based on a bunch of 6 priced £1.45 \*3 Painkillers: Tesco = own brand; McColl's = Anadin; Co-op = own brand; \*4 Coke or cola; Aldi price based on pack of 6; \*5 Walkers: Aldi price based on 6-pack of Snackrite; \*6 Water: Tesco = Aqua Aura; Co-op = own brand; \*7 Mars bars: Aldi = Titan bar; \*8 Filter coffee: Aldi price based on 250g jar; Tesco = Tesco Columbian; Co-op = Fairtrade; Jones = Lyons; \*9 catfood: Aldi = tin of Vitacat; \*11 Light bulb: Aldi = 11W bulb; \*12 Toilet paper: McColl's = Nouvelle; Co-op = own brand; \*13 Bag for life: Aldi = biodegradable; \*14 Washing powder: Aldi = Alma Liquid; Tesco/Jones/McColl's = Ariel Turn to 30°; Co-op = Ecover

MYSTERY SHOP SCORES	TESCO EXPRESS	ALDI	MCCOLL'S	CO-OP GROUP	JONES C-STORES
<b>Availability</b>	5	4	4	5	5
<b>Green products</b>	2	4	2	5	1
<b>Customer service</b>	5	5	2	5	5
<b>Extra services</b>	2	0	3	3	4
<b>Community</b>	4	1	3	2	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	18	14	14	20	19

Source: Five convenience stores in the Bristol area last Thursday. They were Jones Convenience Stores in Bitton, Co-op Foodstores in Thornbury, McColl's in Little Stoke, Tesco Express in Bradley Stoke and Aldi in Bradley Stoke.