

I'm not a bot





The US coffee market is experiencing a wild surge driven by insanely busy schedules and long working hours, which boost the business of coffee chains catering to the increasingly demanding tastes of coffee enthusiasts. These consumers seek certified coffee products wrapped up with excellent coffee shop experiences, and the numbers strongly suggest the game is worth taking. The worldwide coffee market size is estimated to jump from \$138.37 billion in 2023 to \$174 billion in 2030. While the substantial market value is attributed to the growth of major coffee chains like Starbucks and Dunkin', there is still room for local players if they can effectively build customer experiences that are convertible to client loyalty. This way, digital loyalty programs are crucial for their success, aiding in maintaining existing customer bases, attracting new ones, increasing sales, and boosting profits. Most importantly, rewards programs are proving to be an almost surefire way of delivering high value to clients and solidifying behaviors that benefit the coffee brand. Below, we examine some of the most successful examples of coffee loyalty programs and draw comparisons between them. 1. Costa Coffee Club When it comes to coffee loyalty schemes, Costa has paved the way for many developments in the coffee industry and set an example for other coffee shops to follow. Having launched its very first iteration in 2010, Costa was the first points-based loyalty program in the coffee industry, and since then, the chain has gained six million loyal customers. What's more, one third of Costa's sales comes from its loyal customers. However, despite hitting the ground running back in 2010, Costa was not immune to the soaring competition in the coffee industry, as well as the increasing number of attractive loyalty programs that gradually made Costa Coffee Club feel somewhat stale. And when its sales further plummeted as a result of the pandemic, Costa knew it was time to reexamine its loyalty strategy and give its program an overdue glow-up. In 2021, Costa rolled out a brand new iteration of its loyalty scheme. Based on extensive qualitative research, the chain decided to give loyalty customers exactly what they wanted. While the new program remained simple in its value proposition, it ticked many boxes that appealed to today's consumers, such as an attractive UX, emphasis on sustainability and the chance to earn freebies faster. Costa's new loyalty program places greater emphasis on sustainability. Costa Coffee Club: The coffee loyalty program mechanics Under the new loyalty offering, customers collect "beans" instead of points, and 10 beans are needed to earn a free drink. This makes earning a complimentary beverage more than half as expensive as it was under the points scheme (£26.40 vs. £66). What's more, customers using reusable cups only need five beans to claim their free drink, further adding to the savings and saving the planet, of course. The new digital loyalty program also employs a Surprise and Delight tactic in the form of birthday rewards, such as free cake on a loyalty member's birthday. What's not to love? Costa's new loyalty program places greater emphasis on sustainability. 2. Starbucks Rewards Perhaps even better known than its major competitor, Costa Coffee, is Starbucks. Founded in 1971, the coffee chain has become something of a cultural icon. The brand and its double-tailed mermaid feature in films, TV and everyday jokes about hipsters and college students. Comic-making fun on the set of the staff writing the names on the cup, which was made popular by Starbucks' loyalty program, Starbucks Rewards currently boasts over 35,000 stores worldwide. The program is currently valued at \$36.2 billion. Starbucks' success is almost unparalleled in the coffee industry, and the chain accounts for over 75% of all coffee shop sales. However, these numbers aren't merely due to Starbucks simply existing. Their loyalty efforts in recent years have a lot to do with their success. Starbucks' loyalty program, Starbucks Rewards, is one of the most successful programs of its kind and the coffee chain attributes over 40% of its total sales to the rewards program, which boasts a loyalty base of 31 million members in the US alone. Starbucks Rewards has changed its currency from points to stars. Starbucks Rewards: The coffee loyalty program mechanics Starbucks Rewards is slightly more complex than Costa's loyalty program. For starters, it's tier-based, and the currency used to reward members is "stars." Customers are given one star per \$1 spent when paying by cash/credit, and two stars per \$1 when preloading funds onto the Starbucks app or card. Starbucks stars can be exchanged for rewards. Starbucks Rewards is a relatively straightforward 2-tier points-based program where customers earn one star per 2 PLN spent. Eighty stars can be redeemed for a free drink, with the Gold tier at 200 stars providing additional perks like free modifiers and a birthday treat. Registration creates an account to track progress. Earning Stars Clients earn one Star for every 2 PLN spent at Starbucks Stars can be earned by paying via the Starbucks app, card, or other payment methods Reward levels Green Level (Entry Level): Free birthday drink or cake when reaching this level Gold Level (200 Stars): Free extras like extra espresso shots, syrups, whipped cream on drinks Redeeming Stars Registration and account All loyalty program members are in for occasional treats such as "double star days" and access to exclusive games and offers. As part of their loyalty program, Starbucks also offers prepaid Visa cards that customers can use when shopping at Starbucks and other retailers. In return, they can earn stars a lot faster than members paying via other means. 3. Cafe Nero/Caffe Nero Founded in 1997 in London, the Italian-influenced chain Caffe Nero (also spelled Cafe Nero), is yet another successful coffee shop brand. While perhaps not as culturally iconic as Starbucks, Cafe Nero still enjoys a fairly sizable monopoly on the coffee market. Its managing group posted record sales of £310m for the six months to the end of November 2024. Though a lot of its success can be attributed to engaging with new sales channels such as Uber Eats and its Coffee At Home business, to name just a few, similar to its competitors, Cafe Nero has also been working on revamping its loyalty scheme. Initially starting with a simple proposition, such as "buy-nine-get-one-free" stamp cards, the coffee chain is now taking a lead out of its competitors' book and experimenting with things such as gamification, as well as placing a greater emphasis on sustainability. Cafe Nero has migrated its stamp cards onto its app, where users can also find a range of exclusive treats and deals. Cafe Nero: The coffee loyalty program mechanics In 2017, Cafe Nero launched an app allowing users to collect their points without the need for physical stamp cards. This has clearly been a success with its customer base, and the app was downloaded a million times in its first year. Since then, Cafe Nero has also run a number of loyalty-focused, gamification-based campaigns to increase engagement, for example: Unlimited coffees over a certain period of time for people who purchase their coffee with the Cafe Nero loyalty payment app Clients using the app receive a surprise reward The chance to win one of 10,000 free coffees when purchasing during its Christmas promotional period The brand continues to engage with gamification tactics to maintain high levels of engagement across all of its markets and differentiate itself from the competition. It's also responding to consumers' desire for environmentally conscious products, by rewarding customers using reusable cups with an extra digital stamp. 4. Dunkin' Founded over 70 years ago, the American-based coffee and donut company, Dunkin' Donuts is a key player in the coffee industry. Available in 36 countries and 12,871 locations, it maintains a 26% share of the U.S. coffee shop market. While its famous donuts probably played a part in its success, its loyalty program, Dunkin', has brewed quite a storm as well. Within three years of the Dunkin' launch, 7.5 million people signed up for the app. Thanks to a combination of clever technology investment, its customer-centric app and savvy marketing, Dunkin' Donuts has built a sizable empire of loyal customers. The Dunkin' app's features Dunkin': The coffee loyalty program mechanics The success of the chain's loyalty program is made up of three key parts, namely: The Dunkin' app, which is currently rated as one of the top five stars on the App Store, is more than a barcode users scan to claim or spend their points. It also functions as a digital wallet and an ordering platform, allowing clients to order ahead and pay within the app and skip the queues, making the app irresistibly convenient. Apart from earning the standard number of points (10 points per dollar spent), Dunkin' Donuts offers program members lots of opportunities to earn extra points and rewards. For example, crediting members extra points upon hitting important business milestones, offering generous seasonal discounts and special codes, running campaigns that give users the chance to win cash prizes, and lots more. Dunkin' Donuts knows how to stay relevant among its clients and foster lasting loyalty. The brand has also been particularly good at engaging with its customers on social media. Thanks to its frequent campaigns and promotions, its loyalty members have been happy to refer friends and make their love of the brand known on their social profiles, making their loyalty engine a self-perpetuating cycle. What makes Dunkin' Donuts' rewards program so successful is the fact that the brand is ready to go the extra mile and continue engaging and re-engaging users beyond their standard point offerings or free birthday drinks. 5. Krispy Kreme Rewards Continuing with the donut theme, we arrive at Krispy Kreme, a globally recognized donut and coffeehouse brand founded in 1937. The brand remains a strong competitor in the coffee chain industry. As such, it's no surprise that Krispy Kreme has decided to come out with its own loyalty program to optimize its existing customer engagement offerings. Krispy Kreme Rewards app Krispy Kreme Rewards: The coffee loyalty program mechanics Krispy Kreme Rewards, the program's official name, has a relatively unique and complex benefits structure. It's made up of four rewards "tracks," which are coffees, specialty coffees, singles, and doughnuts. Any time a customer purchases an item from one of the four tracks, they receive a single credit for that very track. In order to get a freebie from one of the categories, members need 12 credits in total, for example, buying 12 specialty coffees will get you a free specialty coffee. Essentially, each track functions like a digital stamp card. Although the loyalty scheme sounds fun, earning rewards may take some time, with credits being split four different ways and no way to merge credits from different tracks. Also, the fact that at least 12 coffee purchases are needed to get a free beverage makes the program not as kind on the wallet as some of the other coffee loyalty programs. The credits also expire after 90 days, so there's a chance that some will expire if we don't keep track (pun not intended) of them. The program's redeeming feature is the free donut members get upon registering, in addition to exclusive access to deals and offers that can be found within the Krispy Kreme Rewards app. The revamped Krispy Kreme Rewards aims to be more generous by allowing faster points accumulation across all purchases and more flexible, customizable rewards redemption compared to the previous credit-based model [4][5]. The welcome offer, birthday treat, and other perks further incentivize joining the new program. Recently, the Krispy Kreme Rewards program was revamped to allow faster points accumulation across all purchases and more flexible, exclusive rewards redemption compared to the previous credit-based model. The welcome offer, birthday treat, and other perks further incentivize joining the new program. Krispy Kreme's revamped rewards program: The key elements of the renewed Krispy Kreme Rewards program include: Members now earn 10 points for every \$1 spent at Krispy Kreme, replacing the previous system where 12 specific item purchases were required to earn a reward. More flexible rewards redemption Points can be redeemed at varying levels for different rewards, such as a free single doughnut, 3-pack, 6-pack, dozen dozen doughnuts, coffee, and hot chocolate drinks. This allows members to customize their rewards based on their preferences. To kick off the new program, Krispy Kreme gave all members (new and existing) a free Original Glazed dozen doughnuts from April 30 to May 1, 2024. Members receive a free sweet treat on their birthday under the new program. Limited-time product trials There will be opportunities for members to try new, limited-time products for free. 6. Greggs Although not as internationally recognized as some of the brands mentioned above, Greggs remains one of the UK favorites. Founded in 1939 as a bakery, Greggs has been steadily transforming itself from a sausage roll merchant into one of the country's most popular coffee shop chains, now hosting more than 2,600 shops across the UK. In recent years, the brand has been achieving record results, achieving £2 billion in sales in 2024 - up 11.3% from 2023 results. These great results follow Greggs' efforts to expand their coffee proposition by investing in better coffee machines, providing WiFi, and offering more seating in order to recreate the coffee shop experience customers usually go to Starbucks for. Similarly to its competitors in the coffeehouse industry, Greggs has also set to work on its loyalty scheme, going beyond physical stamp cards and updating their app with their new loyalty offerings. Greggs fans now get to enjoy a wider variety of rewards, ranging from sweet treats and savory bakes to hot beverages. Greggs Rewards is divided into five different categories. Greggs Rewards: The coffee loyalty program mechanics However, its overall loyalty proposition is very similar to Krispy Kreme's before revamping. Functioning as a digital stamp card, credits are also divided into a number of different categories, such as breakfast, savories and bakes, drinks, sandwiches and salads, sweet treats and hot food. The good news is that coffee drinkers only need to buy nine coffees before they receive a free one. Given that Greggs is typically seen as the more affordable option, it's clear why the brand is soaring in popularity among coffee drinkers. Greggs Rewards wallet balance Greggs also gives loyalty members a free hot beverage upon registering and a sweet treat on their birthday. 7. MyMcDonald's Rewards The brand that hardly needs an introduction, McDonald's, though best known for its burgers, has actually been brewing a storm among coffee lovers who swear by McCafé Coffee. Given that the chain is easily accessible in all corners of the world and has consumer-friendly prices, we can definitely see the appeal. Although there isn't a designated app for McDonald's Café, the MyMcDonald's Rewards algorithm regularly features lots of coffee-related rewards for its devoted coffee drinkers. Source: Starbucks Rewards The coffee loyalty program mechanics McDonald's keeps its app fairly simple, which probably accounts for some of its success. For each \$1 spent, the customer earns 100 points in the QSR loyalty scheme. The points can be later exchanged for free meals. The more points you have, the higher tier you are in and therefore, you can redeem more valuable prizes. The program is split into four points-based tiers: 1,500, 3,000, 4,500, and 6,000 points for different rewards from the 16 menu items. MyMcDonald's Rewards - the loyalty program to earn bonus points on your McDonald's orders For coffee lovers specifically, the app functions as a digital collection of alternating deals and coupons. Examples of past campaigns include a deal where buying five McCafé beverages gets you one for free, or coupons for 1-cent medium or large beverages when buying a McCafé drink - basically a buy-one-get-one-free. Although the app may not have all of the fancy offerings that consumers can find with your average coffee chains, the program works due to its generosity, which doesn't go unnoticed by coffee consumers. 8. Peet's Coffee/Foedro In sunny Berkeley, California, in the 1960s, Peet's Coffee is undoubtedly a much smaller coffee chain. Its 289+ coffee stores can only be found in the US, with 80% of them in California. Even so, the chain is credited with introducing the country to darker roasted Arabica blends, which lend themselves especially well to a good morning espresso. Apart from serving its blends in its coffee stores, Peet's also enjoys deals with a number of grocery stores in the US, which offer the brand's freshly roasted beans, brewed coffee, bottled cold brew and other coffee-based drinks. Peet's Coffee is also served at airports and Californian universities such as Berkeley and Stanford, making the brand especially popular with younger sections of the population. Peetnik Rewards app Peetnik Rewards: The coffee loyalty program mechanics rewards scheme, Peetnik Rewards, keeps it very simple - which is probably not a bad thing considering how easy it makes for program members to redeem their rewards, unlike some of the above-mentioned coffee brands. Customers signed up for the loyalty program receive one point per every \$1 spent. 125 complimentary points after their first purchase, in addition to an extra 25 birthday points alongside a treat of choice. Peet's Coffee recently revamped their range of offerings, increasing the number of different rewards for members to enjoy, for example, lattes, alt-milks, coffee beans and other treats. Peetnik Rewards and points. Members can also skip the morning queues by ordering and paying contactless within the app. 9. Gregorys Coffee The New York-based Gregorys Coffee is a fairly recent addition to the U.S. coffee scene. Though the chain only opened its doors in 2006 and its 24th store in the last few years, the brand has been achieving record results, achieving £2 billion in sales in 2024 - up 11.3% from 2023 results. These great results follow Greggs' efforts to expand their coffee proposition by investing in better coffee machines, providing WiFi, and offering more seating in order to recreate the coffee shop experience customers usually go to Starbucks for. Similarly to its competitors in the coffeehouse industry, Greggs has also set to work on its loyalty scheme, going beyond physical stamp cards and updating their app with their new loyalty offerings. Greggs fans now get to enjoy a wider variety of rewards, ranging from sweet treats and savory bakes to hot beverages. Greggs Rewards is divided into five different categories. Greggs Rewards: The coffee loyalty program mechanics However, its overall loyalty proposition is very similar to Krispy Kreme's before revamping. Functioning as a digital stamp card, credits are also divided into a number of different categories, such as breakfast, savories and bakes, drinks, sandwiches and salads, sweet treats and hot food. The good news is that coffee drinkers only need to buy nine coffees before they receive a free one. Given that Greggs is typically seen as the more affordable option, it's clear why the brand is soaring in popularity among coffee drinkers. Greggs Rewards wallet balance Greggs also gives loyalty members a free hot beverage upon registering and a sweet treat on their birthday. 10. Caribou Coffee Caribou Coffee Roasters has seen exceptional results with its simplistic "digital punch card" approach to loyalty program. Sometimes, less is more! Offers such as "Buy X, Get Y" or "Spend X, Get Y" are easy to understand and often show the best results. To rival the loyalty programs of larger coffee chains like Starbucks Rewards, Caribou Coffee introduced "Caribou Perk," a strategic initiative designed to reward and incentivize customers for their repeated visits and purchases through a points-based system. Caribou Perks homepage. Caribou Perks: The coffee loyalty program mechanics Here's how Caribou Perk operates: Upon joining, new members are greeted with a welcoming gesture - a complimentary medium beverage on their inaugural visit, crafted to their preferences. As for earning points, it's simple: Members of Caribou Perks accumulate 2 points for every \$1 spent on purchases at participating U.S. Caribou Coffee locations. Whether they're checking in at the store or making eligible online purchases while logged into their account, every transaction contributes to their point tally. Naturally, the more frequently customers visit and make purchases, the faster their points accumulate. Once points are amassed, members have rewards awaiting them. From the threshold of 25 points to the more substantial milestones of 50, 100, 150, 200, 300, or 400 points, there's a reward to redeem. Read post Read post Read post Read post Read post When developing a cafe loyalty program idea, it can be tough to know where to start... especially at the moment. While customer loyalty remains crucial to business success, the global cafe industry has undergone some unprecedented changes this year. One such change is the rising importance of contactless business-customer interactions, which affects the way we operate loyalty programs. Cafe loyalty programs have always needed to be enticing and convenient, but now they also need to be contactless. Growing demand for cafe loyalty programs The cafe industry is witnessing a growing demand for loyalty programs as customers increasingly seek value beyond their daily coffee fix. In this fast-paced world, a personalized touch can transform a simple coffee purchase into a rewarding experience, encouraging repeat visits and deeper customer relationships. 1. Stick to a simple stamp card system It's safe to assume many cafe owners would be ecstatic to have a loyalty program as sophisticated as Starbucks Rewards. And while Starbucks Rewards is indeed the Holy Grail of digital loyalty apps, you don't need all the bells and whistles in order to retain customers, boost brand loyalty and increase engagement. That being said, we can get it off the ground, including inspiring your staff to become loyalty program ambassadors offering an upfront incentive: running social media competitions using your loyalty program to demonstrate good corporate citizenship. You can learn more about these techniques in our comprehensive Cafe's Guide to Customer Loyalty Programs. 2. Swap your paper punch cards for a digital loyalty app Digitizing your cafe loyalty program gives you access to something which will change your business forever: customer data. With a digital loyalty program, every transaction provides your rewards database with new information on each customer, such as: These are just the bare minimum data points. For instance, by asking customers' date of birth upon registration (in exchange for an annual birthday reward offer) the rewards platform can automatically segment each customer into an age group. This is called personalization, and when it's done right, it can increase customer satisfaction by as much as 640%. All of this information helps the digital rewards platform to send customers targeted communications and tailored offers. This kind of personalized customer experience just isn't possible with paper/plastic loyalty cards. Stamp Me Head of Marketing Michaela Ward says it best: "What a digital loyalty program offers that a paper punch card doesn't", is the means for direct communication. "Start Free Trial of Stamp Me Why have direct communication with your customers? 3. Gamify the customer experience To gamify a process is to take an ordinary task - a driving test, exercising or perhaps employee training - and make it fun by adding gaming components to it. Consider any non-game activity you've engaged in where you were rewarded badges, placed on a leader board or unlocked access to new arenas for participating in some way. When brainstorming a cafe loyalty program idea, gamification is an excellent way to engage customers and build hype around your brand. The same behavioral principles that make scratch-and-win cards so successful for lotteries and gaming businesses can also be used as a creative marketing tactic and promotional tool to engage customers. Stamp Me offers gamified features as a standard function of our Pro and Elite loyalty program options, including access to a very effective Scratch & Win instant prize campaign. 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