



Back-to-School Shopping Survey

Value wins as shoppers prioritize Savings over brand loyalty

New survey of U.S. parents and students reveals a back-to-school shopper who is willing to spend more this year but is demanding more value in return.

The background of the entire page is a blue-tinted photograph. On the left, three children with backpacks are walking away from the camera on a sidewalk. On the right, the front of a school bus is visible, including its headlights and grille. The overall scene is set outdoors with some foliage visible at the top left.

2026 SURVEY REPORT

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About Snipp

Back-to-school shopping remains one of the most significant annual spending events for American households, but consumers are approaching the 2026 season under increasing financial pressure. Higher fuel prices, persistent inflation, elevated grocery prices, and rising housing costs are forcing shoppers to make more deliberate purchasing decisions as they prepare for the upcoming school year. With fuel and transportation costs continuing to strain household budgets, many consumers are actively seeking ways to offset expenses through earlier shopping, retailer switching, lower-cost brands, and greater use of promotions, cashback offers, and loyalty programs.

This survey of 1,000 U.S. consumers reveals how economic pressures are reshaping back-to-school shopping behavior. **The findings highlight a growing emphasis on value, a willingness to switch brands and retailers for better deals, and a heightened focus on stretching household budgets without compromising essential purchases. Together, these insights provide a clear view of how consumers are navigating the 2026 back-to-school season and what brands and retailers can do to remain relevant in an increasingly value-driven marketplace.**

Methodology

This survey, conducted in June 2026 on a nationally representative sample of 1,000 U.S. consumers participating in back-to-school shopping, was designed to understand how rising costs across everyday household expenses, including groceries, transportation, housing, and fuel, are influencing back-to-school spending decisions. With fuel prices remaining elevated and continuing to impact household budgets, the research explores how consumers are adapting their shopping behaviors, prioritizing purchases, and seeking greater value during one of the year's most important retail seasons.

Respondents were screened using a qualifying question to ensure they were involved in purchasing back-to-school items for themselves, their children, or other household members. The survey included parents and guardians of K-12 students, college students, and consumers purchasing school-related products and supplies.

The survey comprised 19 substantive questions spanning expected spending levels, affordability concerns, budget pressures, shopping timing, retailer and brand selection, promotional influence, loyalty program participation, price sensitivity, and future shopping intentions. An additional open-ended question captured respondents' biggest challenges when preparing for the back-to-school season, providing qualitative context to the quantitative findings.

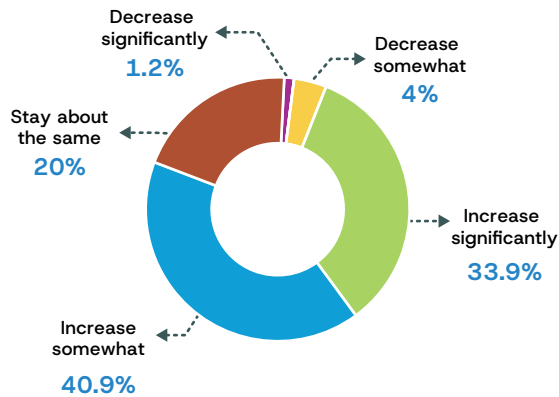


Spending & Economic Pressure

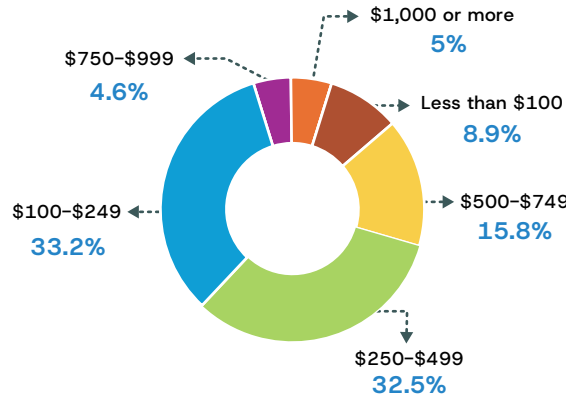
Spending is Rising Despite Affordability Concerns

Back-to-school spending remains resilient despite growing financial pressures. Most shoppers expect to spend more this year than they did in 2025, while affordability concerns remain widespread. Rising prices across essentials such as groceries, fuel, and household expenses are forcing consumers to allocate larger budgets to back-to-school purchases, creating a tension between spending needs and financial realities.

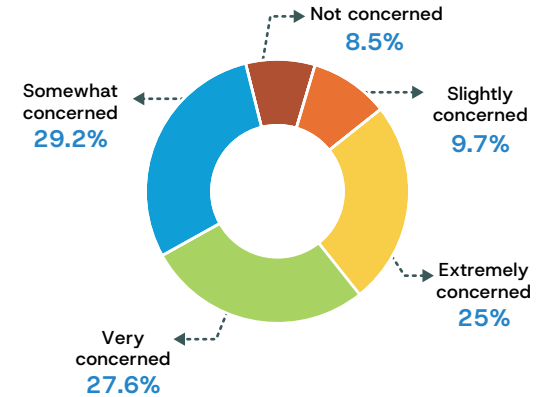
Compared to last year, how do you expect your overall back-to-school spending to change in 2026?



Approximately how much do you expect to spend per student on back-to-school purchases this year?



How concerned are you about the affordability of back-to-school shopping this year?



Insight & Takeaway:

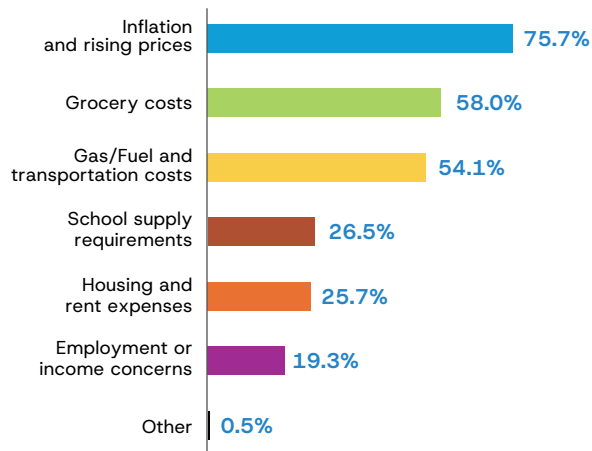
Consumers are spending more, but not necessarily buying more. Rising prices across multiple household expense categories, including fuel and groceries, are forcing shoppers to allocate larger budgets to back-to-school purchases. Brands and retailers that clearly communicate value and help shoppers stretch their budgets will be best positioned to capture spending.

Shopping Behavior

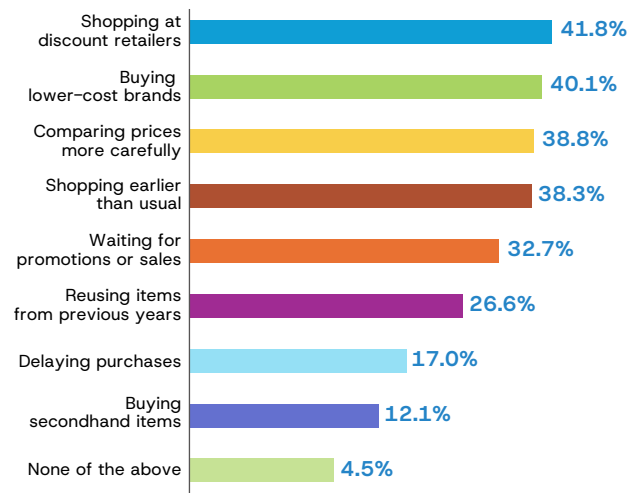
Consumers are Taking Control of their Spending

Economic pressures are changing how consumers approach back-to-school shopping. Shoppers are actively looking for ways to manage costs by purchasing lower-cost brands, shopping at discount retailers, and spending more time searching for deals. Many are also starting their shopping earlier than usual, largely due to concerns that prices may continue to rise as the season progresses. Rather than reacting to promotions, consumers are proactively planning purchases and seeking savings opportunities.

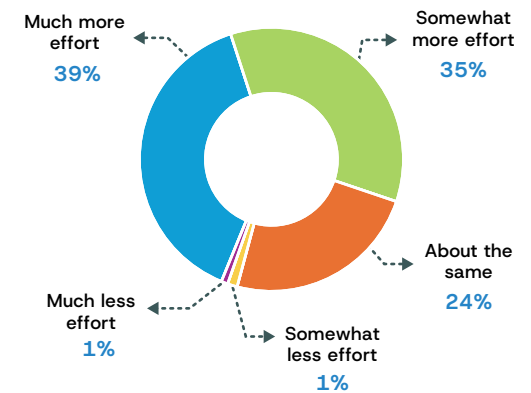
Which of the following factors are putting pressure on your household budget?



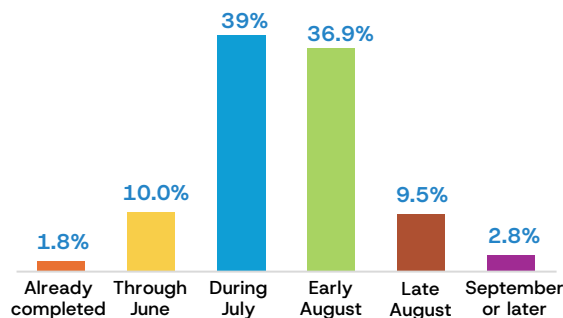
Which actions are you taking to manage back-to-school costs?



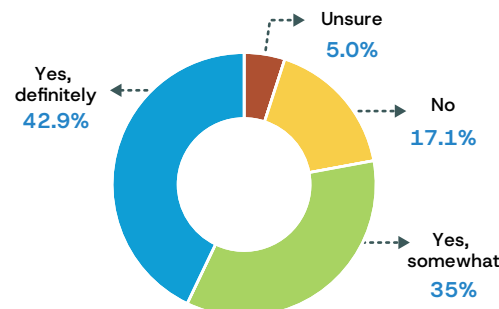
Are you spending more effort finding discounts, promotions, cashback, or rewards?



When do you expect to complete most of your back-to-school shopping?



Are you shopping earlier this year because of concern prices may increase later in the season?



Insight & Takeaway:

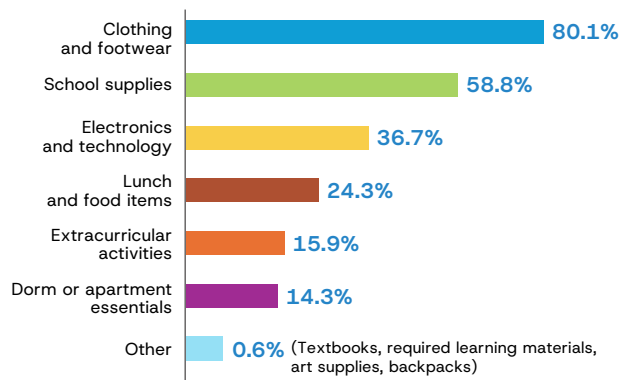
The back-to-school shopper has become a strategic planner. Deal-seeking behavior is no longer limited to highly price-sensitive consumers. Most shoppers are taking active steps to control costs, making early-season promotions and value messaging increasingly important for influencing purchase decisions.

Brand Loyalty & Value

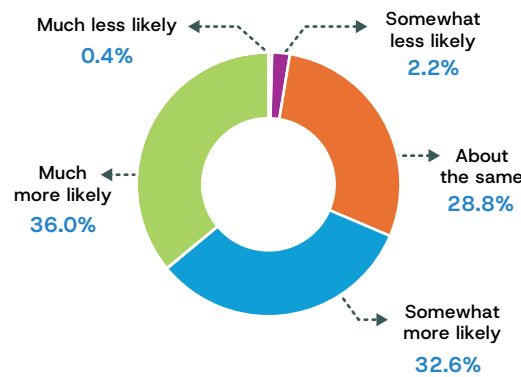
Value is Winning the Loyalty Battle

Brand loyalty is being tested as economic pressures mount. A significant majority of consumers report being more likely to purchase lower-cost or store-brand alternatives this year. Value has become a more important consideration than loyalty to specific brands or retailers, and shoppers are increasingly willing to switch products if they perceive a better deal elsewhere. While trusted brands still matter, they are no longer immune to price-based competition.

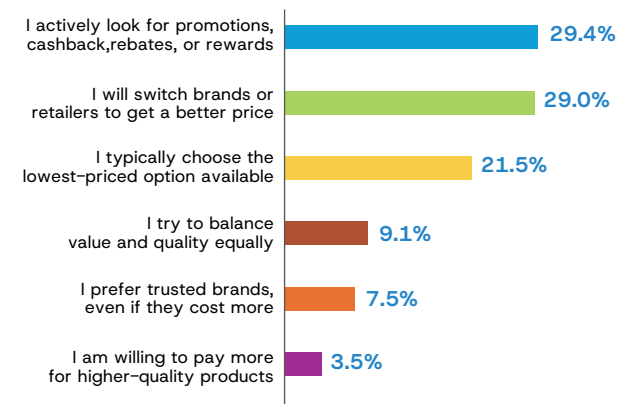
Which back-to-school categories do you expect to spend the most money on this year?



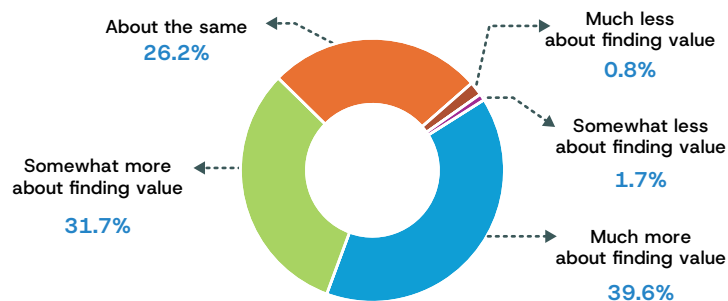
Compared to last year, are you more likely to purchase lower-cost or store-brand products?



When shopping for back-to-school items, which statement best describes your behavior?



Compared to previous years, do you feel back-to-school shopping is becoming more about finding value than staying loyal to specific brands or retailers?



Insight & Takeaway:

Value is becoming the new loyalty. Consumers are prioritizing affordability over familiarity, creating opportunities for retailers, private-label brands, and challengers to win market share. National brands must reinforce their value proposition through promotions, rewards, product innovation, or differentiation to maintain loyalty.

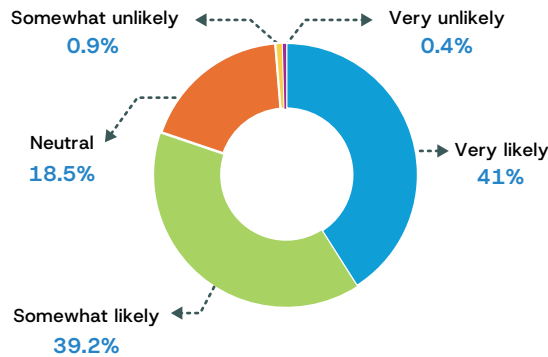
71.3% say BTS shopping is becoming more about finding value than staying loyal to brands.

Promotions, Cashback & Loyalty Programs

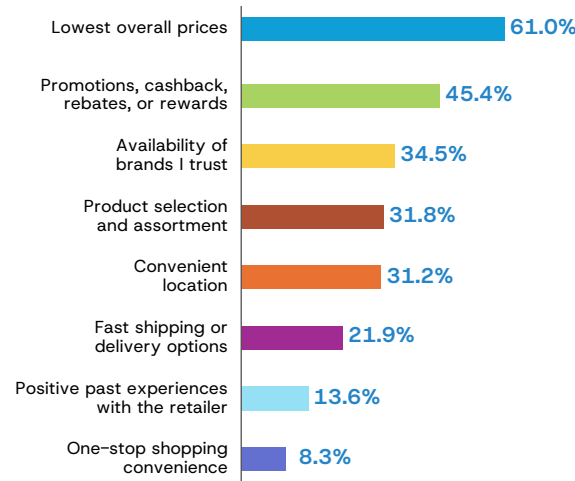
Promotions Are Driving Brand Choice

Promotions have become one of the most influential drivers of back-to-school purchase decisions. Most consumers indicate they would consider switching brands for a compelling offer, while coupons, cashback, and loyalty rewards are expected to play a significant role in shopping behavior throughout the season. Among all incentives, immediate discounts and cash savings are viewed as the most valuable.

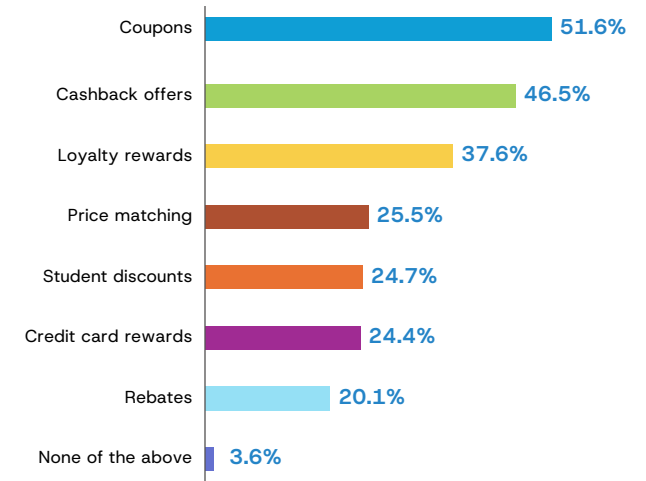
If a competing brand offered a meaningful discount, cashback offer, or rebate, how likely would you be to switch from your preferred brand?



Which incentive would be most likely to influence your purchase decision?



Which types of promotions do you expect to use while back-to-school shopping?



Insight & Takeaway:

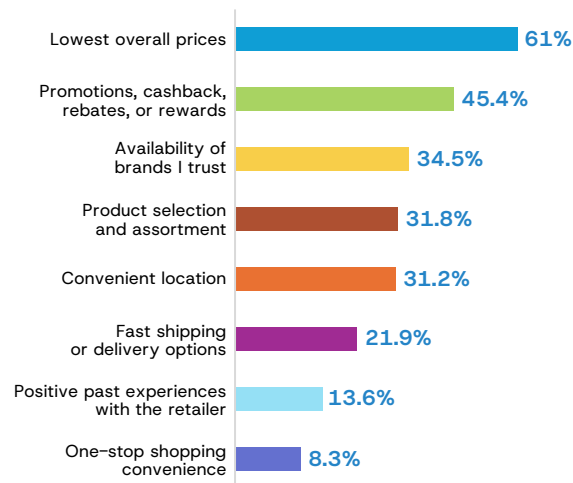
Promotions have become a primary driver of brand choice, with 80% of shoppers willing to switch brands for a meaningful discount, cashback offer, or rebate. Consumers are actively looking for opportunities to save, and brands that provide clear, immediate value through discounts, cashback, rebates, or rewards will be more successful at acquiring and retaining shoppers during the back-to-school season.

Retail Preferences & Shopping Channels

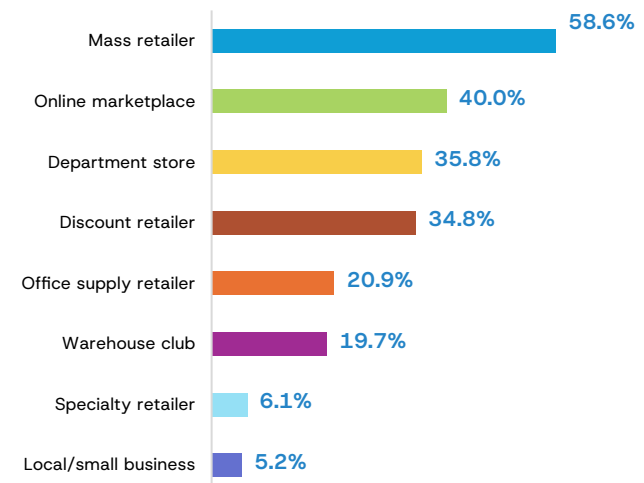
Retailers Win on Price

As consumers navigate rising costs and tighter household budgets, value has become the primary driver of retailer choice. Low prices rank as the most important factor when deciding where to shop, followed by promotions, cashback offers, rebates, and loyalty rewards. Mass retailers remain the preferred destination for back-to-school purchases, with online marketplaces and department stores also attracting significant shopper interest. While consumers continue to value convenience and trusted brands, the findings make it clear that savings are the primary consideration, with shoppers increasingly choosing retailers that help them maximize their budgets.

When choosing where to shop for back-to-school items, which factors are most important to you?



Where do you expect to do most of your back-to-school shopping?



Insight & Takeaway:

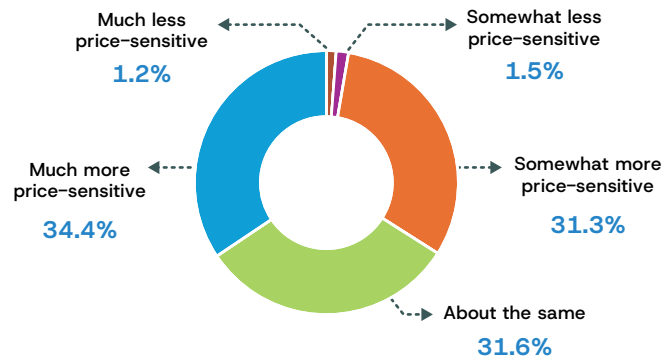
Value is determining where consumers shop. In a season defined by budget-conscious spending, retailers that combine competitive pricing with compelling promotions and rewards programs are best positioned to win share of wallet. The battle for back-to-school spending is increasingly being fought on price, incentives, and perceived value rather than convenience or brand reputation.

Future Outlook & Price Sensitivity

Price Sensitivity Will Continue Beyond Back-to-School

Looking ahead, consumers expect economic pressures, including inflation, grocery costs, and elevated fuel and transportation expenses, to continue influencing household budgets. Nearly two-thirds anticipate becoming more price-sensitive over the next year, suggesting that today's focus on savings, promotions, and value will likely persist well beyond the current back-to-school season.

Looking ahead, do you expect your household to become more or less price-sensitive over the next 12 months?



Insight & Takeaway:

Value-focused shopping is becoming a long-term consumer behavior. Consumers are preparing for continued budget pressure from inflation, rising grocery costs, and elevated fuel prices, and their shopping habits are evolving accordingly. Brands and retailers should view today's demand for promotions, rewards, and savings not as a short-term trend, but as an enduring shift in consumer expectations that will influence purchasing decisions well beyond the back-to-school season.

Consumer Voices

The open-ended responses highlight affordability as the biggest challenge facing back-to-school shoppers. Rising prices, budget constraints, and the need to find deals were recurring themes, with many consumers expressing concern about keeping up with increasing school-related costs while managing broader household expenses.

In your own words, what is the biggest challenge you face when preparing for back-to-school shopping this year?

On rising prices

"Everything costs more than it did last year."

"The prices of school supplies and clothing keep increasing."

On affordability

"Trying to afford everything my kids need."

"Staying within budget while still getting quality products."

On finding value

"Finding the best deals before prices go up again."

"Making sure I'm getting the most for my money."

On school supply requirements

"The supply lists seem longer every year."

"Getting all the required items without overspending."

Conclusion

The Value-First Shopper Has Arrived

This survey reveals a consumer who is still committed to back-to-school spending but increasingly focused on maximizing value.

Key Findings

1. Spending is rising

74.8% expect to spend more on BTS than last year.

2. Affordability is a major concern

81.8% express a level of concern about BTS costs.

54.1% cite fuel costs as a household budget pressure.

77.9% are shopping earlier due to fear of prices increase.

3. Value is winning over loyalty

71.3% say shopping is more about value than loyalty.

4. Promotions drive brand switching

80% would switch brands for a compelling offer.

5. Price Sensitivity Will Continue

65.7% expect to become more price sensitive next year

Key Strategic Implications

For Brands

Lead with visible savings.

Invest in cashback, rebates and promotions.

For Retailers

Price competitiveness matters more than ever.

Loyalty programs should be front and center.

For Marketers

Move campaigns earlier.

Emphasize savings, affordability and value.

For Loyalty Teams

Reward programs are no longer retention tools alone.

They are acquisition tools capable of driving brand switching.

The 2026 back-to-school season is not defined by reduced demand, but by consumers adapting to rising costs. Faced with pressure from inflation, grocery prices, and fuel expenses, shoppers are becoming more strategic, more value-focused, and more willing to switch brands in pursuit of savings.



Snipp is how brands drive actions, prove performance, and unlock insights across consumer and channel marketing strategies. Using AI-powered technology and advanced fraud protection, we design, execute, and validate compliant promotions, rebates, sweepstakes, rewards, and loyalty programs at scale, transforming engagement into proven outcomes and owned first-party intelligence that powers meaningful, measurable growth.

For over a decade, we have worked with the world’s leading organizations in both B2C and B2B spaces, across industry verticals including CPG, retail, pharma, utility, home and outdoor, alcohol, tobacco, lifestyle and more.

Visit us at snipp.com for more details and program examples.



Snipp offers the following solutions

Receipt Processing

Scale activations and reward consumers – an OCR powered validation of any purchase (receipt/PO/invoice etc.) or non-purchase (image, survey, social, etc.) transaction. Retailer and device agnostic. Capture invaluable data.

Promotions & Sweepstakes

Create sweepstakes, GWP, cash-back, instant win, gamification, social media and shopper promotions to drive sales and engagement. Setup, legal and fulfillment too.

Loyalty

Modular customer loyalty platform with comprehensive earn and burn mechanisms as well as deep personalization and segmentation to drive engagement and retention.

Rebates

Streamlined Digital Rebate Management. Flexible, efficient, scalable and secure. One-stop platform for multiple rebate programs for consumers and B2B channel partners.

Rewards

Incentivize and reward customers with an exhaustive catalog-across any geography, industry or consumer demographic. 250+ categories and 58+ currencies.

Digital Offers

Create, distribute, track and measure single or multi-brand digital barcode offers from a single platform that includes the industry first Financial Media Network.

Media Networks

Reach an untapped audience of 65 million+! Brands, retailers and RMNs can reach a bank’s audience with SKU-level offers and promotions on everyday spend items.

Data & Analytics

Capture and make sense of complex consumer behaviors and purchase patterns. Turn this into actionable insights for personalization and engagement.

Snipp’s turnkey contests, sweepstakes and shopper marketing promotions solutions – powered by our market-leading AI receipt validation platform can help you acquire and engage customers while capturing first-party consumer purchase and behavioral data!

LET’S TALK