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Drive-in shopping

TRENDS When you drive into a petrol station, you don't just drive out with a full tank. There is coffee, burgers, flowers, jewellery and more to be bought, finds **RESHMA KRISHANMURTHY SHARMA**

Bite into that juicy burger as your car gets its share of fuel. Yes you read it right. Apart from filling fuel, Bangaloreans have slowly started accessing other services at many city fuel bunks. What was unimaginable a decade ago in India has become reality with fuel stations offering food, grocery, and even jewellery stores on their sites.

Shop for essentials, access ATMs, catch up with pals at a coffee joint, or munch on a burger, buy flowers or even diamonds. Obviously much has changed in the concept of a traditional petrol station. Non-fuel services are in demand as convenience takes centrestage.

Buy movie tickets too

Leveraging on existing space in fuel stations, companies are forging strategic alliances with various retailers; be it cafes or quick service restaurants. A.L. Krishnan, Territory Manager, Retail, Bharat Petroleum, says: "We were the first to bring out the concept of allied retail businesses called 'In & Out' stores in our petrol stations. At select bunks, a customer can not only shop for daily needs but also use other services like booking railway or movie tickets. Now with outlets like Café Coffee Day or McDonalds, our customers will have more reasons to come over to our stations."

"In addition, on highways, our Ghar Dhaba outlets at select petrol stations have offerings like restaurants, dormitory and grocery that are targeted at regular vehicle users and truckers" he added.

Talking about her experience on using non-fuel services at a city petrol station, interior designer, Vaishnavi P. says, "With time posing a major constraint, moving on to different locations to buy a few basic things for home becomes difficult. I like to finish a lot of my out-of-home chores at one place. Many a time, I combine the activity of withdrawing cash from ATM at my regular petrol bunk and fill



DIL MAANGE MORE There's no end to what you can buy in a petrol bunk PHOTO: MURALI KUMAR K.

fuel and this saves me an additional trip to the bank."

Apart from utilising space strategically, fuel stations and alliance partners find support in the form of additional revenues through such services. With marketing gurus reiterating the fact that the customer is the king it has never been better for a vehicle user.

No dearth of takers

Amit Jatia, MD & JV partner McDonald's India (West & South) says: "In today's time

customer convenience and service have become critical driving forces for any industry. With our partnership with Bharat Petroleum and HPCL at select stations in a few cities across southern and western India, we want to give consumers the option to enjoy our product offerings even when they are on the move. Also the response we have received at our quick service restaurants on Kasturba Road and in Channapatna has been encouraging"

Observer of marketing trends, author, CEO, brand-comm, Ra-

manujam Sridhar says: "Yes, this is a concept which is extremely popular in the east. However, more than cities, the idea has greater opportunities to succeed on highways as they have more time to shop."

Whether we like to shop or eat at a petrol station or not, the concept is finding its patrons surely. So remember the next time your family coaxes you for that pending Sunday outing, save time and effort by just driving up to a chic petrol station that does a lot more than just care for your vehicle.

