

Consumer Corner

Surprising Changes In Retail Shopping

(NAPSA)—These days, you can search for product information and gain increased knowledge before you even walk into a store.

Smartphones, online stores and detailed comparison sites are helping shoppers be more informed about what they want. Some customers know more than the salesperson about a new car, laptop or dress.

Retail In The Digital Age

So where does that leave the retailer? Is an in-store salesperson even necessary in today's digital age?

Research by University of Phoenix School of Advanced Studies Senior University Research Chair Fiona Sussan, MBA, Ph.D. may have the answer.

While shoppers have greater access to information than they had in the past, she points out, this does not necessarily mean they have access to accurate information or won't require human assistance in-store.

In fact, Dr. Sussan's research shows retailers that customize to meet the information needs of diverse shoppers are more effective than those who present the same information to all buyers. She calls this ability "adaptive selling." It's the change in selling techniques required to address the specific needs of an individual based on what he or she may or may not already know. It helps retailers truly offer a customized shopping experience.

How To Succeed In Sales

How can retailers and workers who want to grow in the field meet or exceed ever-evolving customer preferences and expectations?

First, retailers need to train staff to better understand how informed the customer is.

Next, sales associates cannot use the same approach and presentation with every customer. Instead, they must adjust their sales behavior based on how much knowledge that customer already has. How well a salesperson can adapt his or her selling approach can influence a buyer's final purchase decision.

The Internet can't replace a salesperson's skills of persuasion and the "personal touch" that leads to trust.

Finally, the research found that selling techniques such as asking questions and responding to the



Research suggests that while technology has changed the way consumers view and treat retailers, that job is more important than ever.

answers with product recommendations, identifying trends in customer traits and devising strategies that are aligned with these traits are ways salespeople can be effective in a tech-enabled retail environment.

Consumers have high expectations of the salespeople they encounter, and Dr. Sussan suggests bad customer relationships are often due to lack of knowledge on the part of the seller.

Updated Education Needed

In an industry that affects so many people, businesses and educators need to recognize this shift and provide training and education that not only prepares workers for the dynamics that exist in retail today, but lays a foundation for growth as the industry evolves. That's where University of Phoenix comes in. Its School of Business provides industry-specific business training for retail workers at all levels who want to enhance their careers. Coursework focuses on the retail management environment, emphasizing skills development in customer service management, sales and marketing, retail operations and talent management unique to the retail industry.

Consumers today desire control, and retailers who nurture these preferences can build strong relationships with their customers that pay off for years to come.

Learn More

For further information on retailing and business education, visit www.phoenix.edu.

For more information about each of these programs, including on-time completion rates, the median debt incurred by students who completed the program and other important information, please visit www.phoenix.edu/programs/gainful-employment.