



Stories from the
SHOP FLOOR

retail workers' attitudes to in-store customer
experience and the use of technology



OVERVIEW

In the ongoing battle to gain ground and increase sales in a tough economic climate, retailers are continuously striving to deliver products and services to meet their customers' needs. Their willingness and enthusiasm to embrace technology which will give customers everything they need for each step of their purchase journey has led to significant changes in the way the industry works, but one key element has not received the attention it deserves – the frontline sales staff.

When it comes to securing the future of retail, both online and in-store, this could prove to be a serious (and costly) oversight. The retail sector in the UK currently employs around 3 million people, each of whom has the ability to affect customer experience in a positive or negative way. And an engaged, motivated and informed sales staff is arguably the retailer's greatest asset, with the power to generate customer loyalty, increase sales and provide a personalised, rich shopping experience.

To establish just how today's sales staff feel about working in a highly competitive retail environment, and to measure their attitudes to customer service and technology as a way of assisting both customers and staff, Red Ant commissioned a major piece of research, conducted among 1,000 retail workers aged 18 – 55+ by online research specialists OnePoll.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The retail workers surveyed were very candid – and the results were revealing:

- **50% of retail workers say they feel embarrassed** by their lack of product knowledge, with a significant percentage admitting that this makes them feel upset, awkward and angry around customers
- **43% admitted to lying to customers** every week due to a lack of product knowledge
- **48% said they made excuses to leave the customer** alone on the shop floor, with more than 1 in 5 doing this daily
- **73% admitted to sending customers to a different store** or member of staff because they couldn't answer simple questions about the product – almost half do this at least once a week
- **The retail workers admitted to a number of methods for avoiding dealing with customers**, including hiding in the toilet and in the store room, pretending to be busy doing other tasks and saying that the product they wanted wasn't in stock/available at the store
- **57% of the shop floor workers surveyed said they were given less than two hours' training** before being expected to deal with customers
- **74% say employers should do more** to provide the tools they need to do their job properly
- **The majority of shop floor staff say technology can improve employee enthusiasm** – 74% say it would have a positive effect on morale and productivity, while 63% say that tablets would help them increase sales by up to 30%. 41% said they use mobile devices and apps every day, and would be very comfortable doing so for work purposes

RESULTS BREAKDOWN

Product knowledge

The retail workers taking part in the survey felt that on the whole they did not have sufficient knowledge about the products they were selling, and a significant number acknowledged that on many occasions the customer knew more than they did. Understandably, this has led to embarrassment, nervousness and, in some cases, anger and frustration:

Shop floor workers say they don't know as much about products as they should



say they don't have as much product knowledge as they should



said they didn't know anything about the product they were selling



knew 'a little about the product'



didn't know as much as they wanted to

Half of retail workers say they feel embarrassed by their lack of product knowledge



say they feel the customer knows more than they do about the product they're selling

Of these:



said this makes them feel embarrassed



shy/nervous/awkward



angry/frustrated



upset

Dealing with customers

The survey revealed that, while customers may have great expectations when it comes to service, retail workers regularly take evasive action to avoid having to deal with them when they feel under-equipped to answer their questions. This is a weekly occurrence for more than a third, who admit to sending customers to other departments, hiding, pretending to be ill and lying about stock availability, among other tactics:

Customer expectations



said customers expected them to make recommendations and offer advice

Of these:



said find stock



tidy up after customers



provide more information about products



make product suggestions



offer a personal, 1:1 service from entering the store to paying for goods

Lying to customers about products due to lack of knowledge



lied to customers due to a lack of product knowledge

Of these:



lie at least twice a day



lie every day



lie every week

Making excuses to leave the customer



admitted to making excuses to leave the customer

Of these:



do this at least twice a day



do this every day



do this every week

Sending customers to other stores/staff members



admitted to sending customers to a different store or colleague

Of these:



do this at least twice a day



do this at least once a day



do this at least once a week

Other customer avoidance tactics:

- Leaving the room before they come in
- Asking a colleague to help then disappearing
- Hiding from them – examples include in the toilet and in the store room
- Serving another customer instead
- Not offering to help somebody looking at a product they weren't sure about
- Pretending to be busy doing other tasks – for example in the store room or cleaning the shop floor
- Giving them the customer service number to call instead
- Pretending to feel ill
- Saying the product they want isn't in stock/available at the store
- Telling them to go and find another member of staff to talk to

Training

The results showed that lack of product knowledge may be down to lack of training, with more than half of those taking part saying that they had under two hours' instruction before they were expected to take to the shop floor and begin serving customers.

Shop floor workers say they aren't given enough training before being asked to sell



said they were given up to just two hours' training



weren't given any training at all before being allowed to sell



were given less than one hour's training



were given 1-2 hours' training

Technology

It was also evident that retail workers believe their employers should do more to bridge this gap, with 74% saying their company could do more to help, and that trusting staff with technology would make a significant contribution to not only sales and customer service, but also to staff motivation and confidence.

Shop workers believe a personal tablet device could help them increase sales:



said yes, by up to 10%



said yes, by up to 30%



said yes, by up to 50%



said yes, by up to 75%



said yes, by up to 100%

How shop workers would feel if provided with a device to use at work:



would feel more valued



would be more enthusiastic



would be better at their job



would provide better customer service



would be more confident



wouldn't change how they feel

Confidence among shop workers in using mobile/tablet devices



of those
aged 18-24



of those
aged 25-34



of those
aged 35-44



of those
aged over 55

The other side of the coin

Like all of us, retail workers are consumers too, and we took the opportunity to measure their own shopping activities and experiences as customers as a useful proof point. The results showed that they are keenly aware of the significance of how they treat customers, and how being informed and knowledgeable can make all the difference when it comes to making sales.

- 97% said they shop online
- 50% said they would rather shop in-store if sales assistants are well-informed and can add value
- 48% said they have noticed a lack of knowledge from staff
- 19% said they have stopped shopping at specific stores due to ill-informed staff

The bottom line

The message couldn't be clearer – retail workers are feeling undervalued and under-prepared when it comes to dealing with customers, and they're prepared to take any number of steps to avoid admitting their lack of product knowledge. As consumers themselves, they know that, while the in-store experience will always be preferable provided there are well-informed sales staff to guide them, customers will have no hesitation in voting with their feet if they feel they're getting less than satisfactory service. It's also evident that, if retailers devote the same kind of resources and investment to equipping their staff with the right technology as they do to providing customers with state-of-the-art web- and mobile based facilities, their sales team will become a force to be reckoned with – engaged, motivated, knowledgeable and armed with exactly what they need to deliver a superior and profitable customer experience.



ABOUT RED ANT – TECHNOLOGY FOR SMARTER RETAILERS

Red Ant partners with retailers to deliver smarter ways to engage with customers through connected mobile experiences. Our connected experience platform RetailOS joins up all your devices and touch points to deliver a seamless shopping experience. RetailOS fully integrates with your existing technology and data sources for an enhanced customer experience to drive engagement and loyalty.

Connected retail experiences

Delivering a seamless shopping experience across mobile, tablet, kiosk, wearables and in-store displays

Personalised customer loyalty

Engaging and rewarding to make every customer feel like a VIP whilst capturing valuable shopper insight

Smarter customer service

Empowering employees with valuable customer insights and knowledge with our cognitive sales advisor and trainer

Founded in 1999, Red Ant has been part of the evolution of digital and consistently at the forefront of innovation and technology change with our strategic partners including IBM, Samsung, and Hybris. In 2014 Red Ant won the IBM Watson Mobile Developer Challenge, and is currently the only company in Europe using the unique capabilities of IBM Watson to develop next-generation retail apps.

Red Ant – Working. Smarter. Together.

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