

What Retail Consumers Really Want

7 Consumer Expectations That Can Make or Break
Your Retail Customer Experience

Are you keeping pace with what retail consumers want? Most retailers are not. Just when you think your retail store or retail brand truly understands what motivates the behavior of retail shoppers, affirms their loyalty, and forges enduring relationships, the bottom falls out. This is the new “business as usual” for retail brands as they face a deluge of ever-evolving consumer expectations.

According to **Accenture**, consumers are giving themselves permission to be inconsistent and make seemingly paradoxical decisions. Partially in response to global instability, 2/3 say making contradictory decisions is totally acceptable.

64% OF CONSUMERS WISH COMPANIES WOULD RESPOND FASTER TO MEET THEIR CHANGING NEEDS, BUT 88% OF EXECUTIVES THINK THEIR CUSTOMERS ARE CHANGING FASTER THAN THEIR BUSINESS CAN KEEP UP.

Source: Accenture

This contributes to a widening gap between actual consumer expectations and what retailers believe they want for an optimal shopping experience. You can see the disconnect here:



Source: Accenture report, The Human Paradox

Closing the Gap Between Expectations and Reality

The **National Retail Federation** is even warning retailers to beware of trends in shopper behavior. For retailers planning to open new stores or make renovations to existing units, says the NRF, retail consumers' expectations are "elevated, even moving toward lofty."

As a starting point for meeting those elevated standards, it's essential that retailers develop a keen understanding of the current retail consumer experience.

To discover the answers, MarketSource took a deep dive into the latest research on the gap between consumer expectations and retail reality. We uncovered seven key expectations that retailers can assess and use to close the gap, reconnect with customers in positive ways, and improve the overall retail customer experience.

What influences consumers to choose one store over another?

What motivates them to visit a store in the first place and come back again?

What interrupts the retail customer journey and drives customers away?

EXPECTATION 1

Unique and Enjoyable Shopping Experiences That Invite Them to Hang Out

This is especially important in the face of rising price consciousness and greater competition from both physical and e-commerce retailers. Younger shoppers are especially drawn to stores that provide participatory activities and encourage socializing with friends. Some retailers are blending retail and entertainment to offer meaningful brand experiences, dubbed “retailtainment”.

This may include workshops and demonstrations, cooking classes, sampling, free consultations, celebrity appearances, and more. Besides making your brand more distinctive and special, these kinds of events are memorable and shareable.

To stay relevant, Accenture advises businesses to move past customer-centric models and embrace a life-centric view that sees people more fully.

| BY THE NUMBERS

68%

of customers will spend more money with a brand that understands them and treats them like an individual.

Source: Khoros

80%

of customers say the experience a company provides is as important as its products and services.

Source: Salesforce

EXPECTATION 2

Transparency is *Essential* When it Comes to Social Responsibility and Sustainability

Consumers appreciate brands that commit to sustainability and are **socially responsible**. It makes them feel good when they can support environmentally responsible businesses, and, particularly among Gen-Z, it resonates with their lifestyle. Although the extra cost of such products is affecting this choice, recent surveys by **IBM with NRF** and the **Baker Retailing Center at the Wharton**

School of the University of Pennsylvania found that up to two-thirds of consumers will pay more for sustainable products.

But there is a catch to going green. Consumers want assurance that businesses do what they say and live up to their promises. Transparency is essential. One **study** found that 59% of consumers think it is important that stores are forthcoming about how their product is made.

| BY THE NUMBERS

59%

of consumers think it is important that stores are forthcoming about how their product is made.

Source: Retailgear

Up to 2/3

of consumers will pay more for sustainable products.

Source: IBM with NRF + Baker Retailing Center at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania

EXPECTATION 3

A Reward for Sharing Their Private Data and Assurance It Will Be Protected

While many consumers will readily share personal data with retailers, they need a valid reason to do so, and they must know what they will be receiving in exchange. According to a **Merkle study**, consumers are “less confident that brands are interested in using this data to improve their customer experience.” Even more significant, according to the **2024 Thales Digital Trust Index**, fewer than 1-in-10 consumers say they trust retailers enough to share their personal information with them.

Retailers should make it known how any acquired data will be used. This goes a long way toward establishing trust between customers and brands. As to how customers are rewarded for sharing data, it should be valuable, and preferably—but not necessarily—tangible. Besides customized coupons and discounts on items related to a customer’s historical preferences, retailers may use the data to make personalized product suggestions, offer product previews on the customer’s favorite brands, or offer other individually meaningful information.

| BY THE NUMBERS

79%

of customers say they're increasingly protective of their personal data.

Source: State of the Connected Consumer, Sixth Edition, Salesforce

71%

of customers say they're more likely trust a company with personal data if its use is clearly explained.

51%

of customers say most companies don't use their personal data in ways that benefit them.

EXPECTATION 4

Access to Proactive Human Customer Service Experiences as They Shop

Online shoppers are used to getting instant information as they browse from site to site and product to product, and they demand the same when they visit stores. When they walk through a retailer's door, they have their research in hand and are ready to explore—and that means more than merely looking at and comparing items they may have seen online.

Particularly when it comes to big-ticket items with various models and features and price points, customers seek expert, face-to-face input and confirmation from a human to make a decisive purchase. And they want it without having to wait.

The quality of in-person interactions can make or break a customer's brand loyalty, not to mention a final purchase. Customers appreciate associates and **brand experts** who listen well, can resolve complex issues, and can empathize. To ensure swift, knowledgeable support, associates should have instant access to information that is critical to the consumer—or at least know where they can access it. Equipping staff with networked devices is a step in the right direction.

| BY THE NUMBERS

88%

of customers say good customer service makes them more likely to purchase again.

Source: *State of the Connected Consumer, Sixth Edition*, Salesforce

75%

of customers have recommended a company based on excellent customer service.

Source: *State of the Connected Consumer, Sixth Edition*, Salesforce

83%

of customers cited good customer service as their most important criterion for making a purchase.

Source: Khoros

EXPECTATION 5

Consistent Brand Interactions Across All Physical and Digital Channels All the Time

Retail customers are platform-agnostic. As a customer travels from a retail website to a social commerce site to a text message to an in-store shelf ad, they want up-to-date information about products, pricing, inventory, and shipping information on all channels.

Their journey should be uniform, if only to avoid having to repeat information to different representatives on different channels, which is frustrating and detracts from a brand's customer-centric reputation.

| BY THE NUMBERS

62%

of customers want to be able to engage with brands across multiple digital channels and devices.

Source: Khoros

77%

of brands struggle to create a cohesive journey across channels.

55%

of customers feel they're communicating with separate departments rather than one company.

EXPECTATION 6

Personalized Communications and Customized Offers

Digital interactions allow retailers and brands to gather and analyze browsing and buying histories. Retailers who are savvy about customer centricity then use this understanding to personalize customer experiences and customize communications and offers to the individual. This puts customers on a path to developing positive relationships with brands.

It also sets the stage for hyper-personalization in which—according to the **NRF**—their preferences and products explored in one channel influence their experience in another. The right kind of directed, meaningful offers and messages can transform that glazed-eyed shopper who once stumbled into your store into an enthusiastic fan of your brand.

| BY THE NUMBERS

75%

of customers say responding to questions promptly with personalized, helpful answers is the most commonly noted quality of their favorite brands.

Source: Khoros

61%

of customers say most companies treat them as a number.

Source: Salesforce

56%

of customers expect offers to be personalized.

Source: Salesforce

EXPECTATION 7

Shopping Convenience That Includes Instant Responses to Their Questions

Once they have taken the time to research a product online, drive to a store, and compare products to buy, customers are reluctant to wait for assistance from a sales associate. They want someone with a deep level of product and brand knowledge and a strong desire to understand each customer's needs.

They want someone who is ready to show them their options, give advice, make suggestions for peripherals or accessories, and help them make a confident buying decision.

| BY THE NUMBERS

82%

of brands struggle to create a cohesive journey across channels and devices.

Source: Chain Store Age (CSA)

2/3

of customers want to be able to engage with brands across multiple digital channels.

Source: Forbes

1/2

of all customers won't wait more than three minutes in a store.

Source: Forbes

Best Bang for Your Buck

Is your retail brand strategy resonating optimally with consumer expectations? Chances are, you see gaps that must be filled, or you risk losing customers to your competitors. Strengthen your brand strategy and accelerate your sales with a partner that specializes in retail growth strategies and promises measurable improvement in the retail customer experience, higher sales revenues, and an excellent return on investment. Got a minute? We are ready to go the extra mile for you.

Contact us now.

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