

ABi's series of 'Fact Sheets for Retailers' provide concise information on the key topic areas that impact on business success within the retail environment. Each fact sheet highlights the key issues and provides practical advice on the given topic.

If you would like any further advice on any issues relating to this fact sheet then please contact us. We will be delighted to help.

ABi Associates Limited is recognised by clients, businesses and agencies as one of the country's leading business development companies. We have over ten years of experience and expertise in providing business support to small businesses to help them succeed and grow.

Today's fast paced, competitive and chaotic consumer world provides a multitude of challenges for retailers. ABi offers a diverse range of unique, innovative and tailored business services to meet these challenges. These services include business diagnostics, training, sign posting, market planning, specialist consultancy and networking events. Whatever your business challenge, we will show you a way of meeting it effectively.

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Getting More Customers: Marketing Review for Independent Retailers



Marketing activities include anything to do with identifying the particular wants and needs of a target market of customers, and meeting those customer wants and needs better than the competitors.

No matter how long independent retailers have been trading successfully, a marketing review can help them to check that they are still serving their customers well.

This review focuses on some of the points that independent retailers can consider in terms of:

- Getting potential customers into the area
- Getting new customers into their shop and
- Getting their first sale from customers

Getting them into the area

What can independent retailers do to get more people into the area?

- Lobby the local authority/town centre management (regeneration plans, street lighting, security and wardens, street cleaning, Christmas decorations, other religious and cultural festivals, parking, including availability and maintenance of parking meters/ticket dispensers, traffic management)
- Work together in Traders Associations (joint marketing initiatives, lobbying, agreements about deliveries and parking for staff/owners, security including radio initiatives)
- Know your neighbours (are local specialist shops well represented on the Internet? Not only specialists but solicitors, accountants and other professionals can also draw new people into a shopping area and increase your passing trade)
- Lobby public transport firms: are the bus stops in the right place? Do buses serve your target customers? Think about how customers get to your shop and how they get home with goods they have bought from you (don't forget local taxi firms – are there any that you can recommend? Can you build a relationship with them to improve service? Is there anywhere to wait for a bus/taxi?)
- Do people know where they can park and when? (Some parking restrictions deliberately discourage commuter parking near stations by putting the restriction in the middle of the day leaving more space for your customers – as long as they know when it is safe to park)

Getting them through the door

Why should customers come into your shop and not into your competitors shop? If you have a good answer to that question, you are on the way to developing a good marketing approach.

A lot of retailers follow a “me too” strategy. They see what their competitors are doing and say “me too. I can do that”. It’s true that you need to be able to match your competitors sometimes, but is that really all you’ve got to offer - that you are as good as the other retailer?

When we ask retailers what makes their shop unique, a majority of them say “quality service”. Do they mean it? Have a look at your shop from the outside and try and see it with the eyes of a potential customer. Is there anything that suggests that you will provide a quality service? Does your shop look clean? Does your shop look well maintained? If your shop is dirty and in need of repair, no new customers will immediately think “I’ll get good quality service here”.

Does your shop look deserted, or is it clear that you have staff waiting to serve customers? What about signs? Does your latest sign say “No more than 2 school kids at once”? That might be a necessary sign but it won’t necessarily get customers in through the door.

Are you making effective use of windows for window display that will attract new customers into your shop?

Of course, word of mouth is important – but what about passing trade?

- Is the shop bright and welcoming?
- Is it clear what you have on offer?
- Are your opening times clear?

Getting customers to buy.

Is it easy to buy?

Well, if the item is out of stock then it isn’t easy to buy – but:

- do customers know that they can order through you?
- if it is a shelf item, is there a ticket telling customers when you will be restocking the item?

Bear in mind that it isn’t easy for all customers to break into a conversation between three of your staff about what they saw on TV last night. This is poor customer service (but all too common).

Do you have an appropriate queuing system? You might have seen that children’s shoe retailers often have a numbered ticket system – particularly around those very busy ‘back to school’ times. If you have similar busy periods, is a ticket or queuing system right for your shop? Or if your customers have other shopping to do, can you take their mobile number and call them when it is their turn? Can you implement a booking system? This is essential for personal services such as women’s hairdressing – but might work for other things – particularly big ticket items: of course the downside is you need to have a system for dealing with “no shows”.

If you have a self-service operation, are there enough staff members with the right product knowledge to help?

Is it clear what payment terms you accept? Do you have a sign that says whether you accept credit and debit cards? Or will you accept cheques up to a certain amount?

If you only accept cash, make sure you have a sign telling customers exactly where the nearest cash machine is located.

Is your market very price sensitive? In general, consumers are not very aware of how much they pay for products, but there is often a perception (not always correct) that the chains and multiples are cheaper. You don’t have to match the low prices of competitors on every line, but some signs providing price comparisons will reassure shoppers who might believe that smaller shops over-charge.

ABi produces a range of Fact Sheets for businesses. The “Customer Care Review” and “Trading in the shadow of the multiples” Fact Sheets provide additional information for independent retailers on this topic.