# THE SALESPERSON'S NEW ROLE

## Introduction

All retail experts agree that sales staff are now the key element of every sales strategy. They are the customer's contact point with the brand, representing the brand and passing on customer feedback to the store. They make sure that information is transmitted from the brand to the customer and vice versa. And as a counterpoint to inexorable rise of digital devices, salespeople offer a natural, spontaneous and reassuring presence. As true ambassadors, they are loyal to the brand and its values, and seek to share their enthusiasm with as many customers as possible.

Davy Dauvergne, Product Marketing & Innovation Retail, Cegid
Thierry Spencer, Associate director, Académie du Service

**Cegid**

Over the last decade, we have seen profound changes in the way customers interact with stores. This change is most evident in the role of the salesperson. More discreet, attentive and, as a result, more effective, the salesperson's role has evolved from simply selling merchandise to assisting and advising customers.

## COMPLETE VISIBILITY ON MERCHANDISE AND INVENTORY

Today's store customers are well-equipped, highly connected and time-pressed. If they haven't already checked the price of the products they plan to buy on competitor sites, they can do so by using their smartphone. More likely than not, they already know the functionalities of all products on the shelf, having studied them online at home. It is futile trying to sell them a more sophisticated product. If they don't need it, you risk annoying them. Customers do not need a salesperson to tell them whether a certain product exists in another color (they already know that); they need to know whether the product is in stock, how soon it can be delivered to their home, if there are any other products that would enhance it, and how it performs compared to other products in the same range. Customers seek advice, not information. In this new context, sales staff must be able to immediately provide customers with accurate information, not leave them waiting while they go in search of it. But to do this, sales staff need the right tools—tools that give them real-time visibility of inventory both in the store and at the warehouse. Sales staff can now be permanently connected to mobile technologies, regardless of where they are in the store. No longer will they have to be physically present at the cash register.

## KNOW YOUR PRODUCT AND BRAND WELL

Customers are more connected and clearly better informed. Their questions focus less on the products and more on what the brand can offer. Be itsporting goods, cell phones or cosmetics, salespeople, perceived as specialists, will be increasingly tested on their subject knowledge. This trend, inherited from the technology sector, is now gaining ground in other sectors. Better informed, these "new customers" enjoy testing their knowledge against that of the brand representative. In specialty retailing, the salesperson must therefore know not only its brand's products, but also those of its competitors, as well as the latest technological advances and forthcoming market innovations. Such expertise demonstrates genuine enthusiasm about the brand's products and you sell far more than just a product; you sell something that will become part of the customer's life. As Maria Flament, Customer Voice manager at Leroy Merlin, says, "*We don't sell furniture, we sell a lifestyle experience.*"

## MORE AUTONOMY AT THE POINT OF SALE

By using their specialist knowledge to promote the brand, sales staff take a position: they know the marketplace, they have compared products themselves and have sided with the brand they now represent. This gives sales staff a certain independence. They act as the brand's ambassador, representing the brand in their own territory, be it their store or department. They are responsible for coming up with creative ways of promoting the brand in the space they have been allocated. In mass retail, Maria Flament insists on the autonomy of sales staff, a concept dear to Leroy Merlin. "*Our sales staff are responsible for their department. They are given full autonomy in this respect. We encourage them to take initiative to put their ideas into practice.*" The brand believes that giving its sales staff more control is a way of showing appreciation for their work and encouraging good ideas that will generate traffic in store.



**75%**

**OF CUSTOMERS RESEARCH PRODUCTS ON THE INTERNET BEFORE VISITING THE STORE**
(Baynote)



**3/4**

**OF EUROPEANS WOULD LIKE TO BE ASSISTED BY STORE STAFF**
(Cetelem observatory)

**2/3 WANT TO BE ADVISED BY A SPECIALIST**

## ADVISING STARTS WITH LISTENING

While technologies can provide information and perform sales transactions, sales staff add true value by offering an emotional connection. In fact, this new consultative role is one of the most fundamental changes to a salesperson's responsibilities. Having long been confined to merely operating the cash register, sales staff can now use their expertise in a consultative capacity. Their role is to guide their customers, support them, explain how to use products and recommend those articles best adapted to the customer's needs. This is a challenging task requiring sales staff to actively listen to their customers. They therefore need excellent people skills in order to build trust with their customers.

In the ready-to-wear industry, for example, sales staff must be able to offer personalized advice to their customers, reassure them on their choices, and suggest new ideas. They must offer a "personal shopper" service, a term that more adequately describes an increasingly strategic function.

According to Thierry Spencer, Associate director at the Académie du Service, "*The challenges of relationship management are shifting. As customer contact decreases, the quality of the human contact will improve. In the future, customers will look for more than a specialist. They will want someone who can build an engaging customer relationship.*"

Clienteling applications based on multichannel information systems help sales staff advise customers. These applications give sales consultants up-to-date information on their customer, such as personal information, purchase history, abandoned shopping carts, and even data from social networks. This information is useful for giving them a clearer idea of their customers' taste and preferences, enabling them to make more pertinent recommendations. Connected to the product catalog, the applications also enable sales staff to propose articles that are not available in store. The key for retailers is to improve customer satisfaction, strengthen loyalty and increase sales volumes.

## GUIDING CUSTOMERS IN THIS NEW ENVIRONMENT

With genuine enthusiasm for their products, sales staff are not only happy to discuss with customers who share their enthusiasm, but also keen to transmit it to other, less frequent customers. "Master of Ceremonies" within their department or boutique, salespeople must think up ways to make intrigued customers open the door and enter their universe. It's up to them to best use the tools that the brand makes available for promotional purposes. Customers therefore experience the brand's message through a unique in-store experience. Depending on the brand and the experience you wish to create, the promise may be different. Certain brands may offer a show-like experience with staging and special effects and heavy use of digital screens, whereas others will

## 62%
**OF EUROPEANS CLAIM THAT THE QUALITY OF ADVICE THEY RECEIVE FROM IN-STORE SALES STAFF IS IRREPLACEABLE**
(Cetelem observatory)
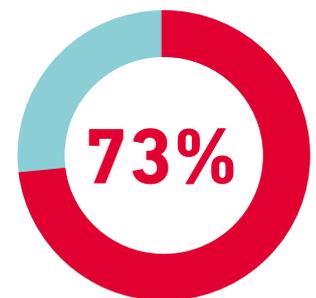
## 73%
**OF EUROPEANS WOULD VISIT BRICKS-AND-MORTAR STORES MORE OFTEN IF A MEMBER OF STAFF WOULD HELP THEM LOCATE PRODUCTS THEY COULD NOT FIND THEMSELVES**
(Cetelem observatory)

## CLIENTELING AND MOBILE POS SYSTEMS - NEW, INTUITIVE APPLICATIONS THAT ARE QUICKLY ADOPTED

Applications designed to support in-store sales staff must be ergonomic and easy to use. Designed for mobile use, the solutions must give sales consultants rapid access to the information they need to improve their customer relationships.

"*Cegid chose Windows 8 for its Yourcegid Retail Mobile Clienteling solution so that sales staff would be immediately operational and have easy access to information in real-time*", explained Jean-François Gomez, Retail Expert at Microsoft France.

focus more on personalized appointments with their customers. In either case, the goals are the same: to give the customer a unique experience. According to Jean-François Gomez, Retail Expert at Microsoft France, *"the store of the future will first and foremost be a store in which the customer and the retailer feel happy."*

## ENGAGE YOUR CUSTOMER COMMUNITY

As the traditional shopping experience is gradually replaced by an increasing number of contact points, retailers must engage their customers beyond the store, and in particular on social networks. "New generation" retailers will not hesitate to promote their brand and extend the customer experience on Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest. Their role is to engage their customer community and encourage interaction with the brand. The dual objective consists on the one hand in improving customer relationships by maintaining ongoing contact with customers and strengthening their loyalty to the brand. On the other hand, it aims to boost the brand's visibility and reputation. The concept of "return on community" designates the ROI from a brand's investment in social networks.
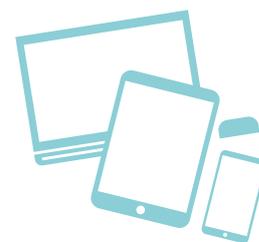
## PASS ON CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

Better equipped, sales staff gain credibility as advisors and their customers consider them on an equal footing. The relationship takes on a new form, as an understanding develops between the customer and the retailer. Having developed a closer relationship with their customers, retailers are in a good position to collect more data on them, including their habits, experience, impressions and expectations. This valuable data collected in store adds to the data previously collected via website cookies and online surveys and forms. The data collected in store by the salesperson is entered into a clienteling mobile POS and received in the IT system to create a single view of each customer. This extra effort to collect information and customer feedback also serves a dual purpose: to propose products that are better suited to the specific needs and wants of each customer, and to improve or personalize certain existing products.

**83%**

OF INTERNET USERS ARE CUSTOMERS OF THE BRANDS OR COMPANIES THAT THEY FOLLOW ON **SOCIAL NETWORKS**

(source: French Union for Direct Communication)

**64%**

OF EUROPEANS SUPPORT **BRANDS' INITIATIVES TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THEIR CUSTOMERS** SO AS TO OFFER THEM BETTER SUITED PRODUCTS AND SERVICES (Cetelem Observatory).

**WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING CONTRIBUTORS:**

Maria Flament, Customer Voice manager at Leroy Merlin
Jean-François Gomez, Retail Expert at Microsoft France
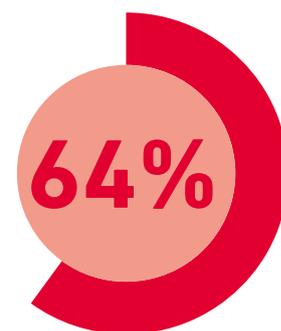Thierry Spencer, Associate director, Académie du Service

Cegid – 09/2014

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