

Equip retail staff to be brand ambassadors and boost your bottom line

By [Mark Thomson](#)

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Most shopping still happens in-store rather than online, but it is clear that online shopping is a significant growth engine so stores need to do more to drive footfall. Respondents to Zebra's [2019 Shopper Vision Study](#) said the top two factors that get them to spend more time in brick-and-mortar stores are product availability and helpful store associates.



Image credit: Getty

Unfortunately, only 62% of our study's respondents were satisfied with the level of information or help associates typically provide. Smartphone-equipped shoppers often feel as though they're better equipped with product knowledge than the store associate who should be the brand's expert.

This is a challenge for retailers. It is no longer enough to elevate employees' profile to the "associate" level. Retailers need their front-line team members – the people who are interacting with customers every day in their stores – to evolve into highly-engaged brand ambassadors.



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Happy employees lead to helpful store associates, which results in happy customers

Though the process to transform associates into brand ambassadors is multi-faceted, the concept is pretty straightforward: give store associates the right tools and information to become invaluable to shoppers.

Zebra's *Shopper Vision Study* revealed that most associates feel limited in their assistive capabilities – they don't feel equipped to help shoppers find items, access customer information or have instant access to product details.

“ But associates empowered with mobile technologies, like barcode scanner-equipped handheld computers or enterprise-grade tablets, reported that they had a positive impact on shoppers. This means they could fulfill their roles as brand ambassadors. ”

These technologies allow them to scan item barcodes for price checks, inventory levels and product lookups for other options that may not be available in-store or access customer information for any available promotions. This exclusive product knowledge encourages shopper engagement with your ambassadors and gives you a valuable touchpoint on the consumers' buying journey.



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Create brand ambassadors by expanding communication channels

Brand ambassadors have a unique pulse on the realities of retail and, as such, play a special role in communications between retailers and shoppers. They understand their companies' visions and brand promises, and that is what helps them speak more intelligently about their products and feel more connected to their employers.

They are the ones fielding both customer complaints and compliments; they know what's working and what's not. Take advantage of their front-row seat to conduct honest assessments of your performance: "close-the-loop" by regularly soliciting their feedback.

Encourage ambassadors to route issues back to senior management and create processes to ensure shop floor teams are heard. Create a culture of diversity and inclusion. Reinforce everyone's role in influencing business decisions. Then train them to become the eyes, ears and voice of the brand both in-store and online.

Enlist employees as brand ambassadors on social media and teach them to support chatbot inquiries. Then give them the time to engage with customers by automating mundane tasks.

Just remember that equipping employees with technology can extend the reach of their effectiveness – and ultimately increase customer satisfaction and retail sales. But if the technology is not easy to use, store associates may fail to prove their value to shoppers.

“ Any technology used for inventory management, online customer service or point-of-sale (POS) transactions must be intuitive. Store associates and/or shoppers, in the case of self-checkout, must be able to understand the technology in less

than 5 minutes. ”

That is the only way to create a frictionless experience and ensure brand ambassadors are in a position to fulfill their missions: to improve the shopper experience and make employees even more valuable than shoppers' "smart" phones.

ABOUT MARK THOMSON

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