

5 shopper expectations that retailers must consider

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By **Douglas Baldasare**

Consumers seemingly felt flush closing out the 2018 shopping season. On average, they spent about \$300 more than 2017, according to a **Deloitte survey**. Research from Adobe Digital Insights found that holiday spend jumped 13.8 percent.

But what can we expect in 2019? In an age where you can buy almost anything with a few swipes of your phone, bricks-and-mortar stores need to make the shopping experience as seamless and frictionless as possible to compete long-term. Unfortunately, that is often not the case and it needs to change this year.

Here are five shopper expectations that retailers need to keep in mind for 2019.

1. Things should be easy to find in store. Many retail stores have been designed to keep shoppers in the store for as long as possible. That is why supermarkets keep staples such as milk and vegetables on opposite ends of the store, for instance.

But modern consumers have little patience for searching through aisles to track down items. Some retailers are using mobile to address this gap.

For example, The Home Depot's application tells shoppers which aisle and bay they need to visit to find an item. Lacking such aids, shoppers are left with few palatable choices: they can try to flag down a sales associate, waste time trying to figure out a retailer's classification system, or get frustrated and go home.

2. Shopping should be fun. Unsurprisingly, a consumer's propensity to think shopping is fun drops as he or she gets older.

About 80 percent of shoppers ages 18-20 find shopping fun, according to a 2017 Market Track Shopper Insight survey. But for those ages 40-49, the figure drops to 44 percent. To address this, retailers need to take a closer look at what makes shopping fun.

A survey from Gensler Research Institute **found** that novelty, beauty and authenticity are important to shoppers. Little things such as tasteful lighting, elegant music and color can make shopping more pleasant and create a memorable overall experience

3. Retailers should be helpful. **Seventy percent** of shoppers report that sales associates significantly influence their shopping experience. But **50 percent** of the time, sales associates cannot answer consumers' basic questions. That situation is accelerated during busy periods such as the holiday season when stores handle larger crowds than usual.

In lieu of human sales help, some stores have introduced in-store kiosks and **even robots**, but such tech solutions cannot take the place of a knowledgeable sales associate who is adept at dealing with people.

Now more than ever, it is important for retailers to invest in hiring and training qualified associates.

4. Retailers should make checkout easier. Amazon Go has raised industry attention for its ability to whisk shoppers quickly in and out without having to face a checkout line.

While few retailers can match that sensor- and AI-based solution, retailers should offer self-checkout lanes or

mobile checkouts a la the Apple Store.

Some **65 percent** of shoppers use self-checkout lanes to avoid a slow checkout experience, according to a 2018 Forrester Research survey.

Eighty-six percent of consumers have left a store because of long checkout lines, according to a report from the Omico Group.

5. Shopping should be an experience. Shopping is often listed as a household chore, but it does not have to be drudgery.

To thrive against online shopping, retailers need to convince consumers that time spent shopping at their stores is time well spent. That means making their trip an experience with perks such as free food samples, entertainment and a comfortable place to sit for those who were dragged along on a shopping trip.

Amenities such as free Wi-Fi and free coffee can also help consumers reframe the shopping experience as positive.

DESPITE CLAIMS of a retailpocalypse, the vast majority of shopping still occurs in stores.

Consumers choose bricks-and-mortar shopping for its immediacy or because they simply like the shopping experience.

Retailers should do all they can to capitalize on those advantages by making shopping as enjoyable and convenient as possible in 2019.

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