

Essay on trends and changes within retail: whole foods market

[Business](#), [Marketing](#)



There are a number of changes that are occurring in the retail sector, and these trends are changing the way that retail connects with customers, suppliers, and so on. For retail organizations, staying on top of emerging trends-- and ensuring that trends are not engaged with too heavily without research-- is important for the success of the organization as a whole. This discussion will center around new trends in retail marketing, and the different driving factors that influence retail marketing and customer service in the industry. In the retail industry, manufacturing and retail are completely separate entities, but they are becoming more and more closely linked as the face of industry changes. Customers are also becoming more and more savvy, and are armed with more information (and choices) than ever before, and these choices are dictating shopper behavior. Retail trends may come and go, but recognizing which trends will become mainstays of the customer retail experience in coming years is something that all successful retail operations must embrace. Changes in retail trends can have a significant impact on the relationship between the customer and the retailer as well.

The first issue to consider when considering retail is the idea of customer information. There is, of course, a very significant drive for retailers to obtain information about their customers and their customers' purchasing habits (RIS, 2014). Obtaining this information can give retailers significant information on marketing trends that they can utilize and strategies for maintaining good customer relations. This type of data gathering provides retailers with the information they need to make decisions about trends in marketing and retail, and provides retailers and their suppliers with a more

cost-effective approach to business (RIS, 2014). There is a downside to all of the information and data gathering, however; recently, in the United States, Target has come under fire as a result of security breaches that have cost many cardholders their personal information (Buhamra, 2014). This security breach was a direct result of all the information-gathering that retailers were responsible for; without the information-gathering trend in retail, there would have been minimal threat to the security of the personal information of all the Target shoppers.

Looking at the Whole Foods Market food retailer, there are a number of important retail trends that can be seen in their marketing strategy. First, insofar as discussing the data-gathering nature of the industry, Whole Foods Market has not entirely embraced the concept of data gathering. However, this does not mean that Whole Foods does not gather data on its consumers, only that it gathers data differently. For instance, Vend HQ (2014) writes, “Retailers will continue to realize that they need to connect with users on multiple channels and touch points simultaneously or even interchangeably. In 2014, more retailers will give customers the ability to interact and complete transactions on their own terms. In other words, if a customer wants to view an item online, purchase it using their phone, and return it by dropping by the store, they can do so in a smooth and seamless way” (Vend HQ, 2014). Whole Foods Market has integrated a number of online and mobile programs that allow the customer to engage with their products over the Internet in a more cost-effective and time-efficient manner; for instance, Whole Foods Market has an interactive website that allows the user to browse for user-specific deals, coupons, and recipes (Whole Foods Market,

2014). This is a type of user-friendly technological integration that has become popular in recent years, and will continue to be popular as time goes on. It seems unlikely that people will become less attached to their technological gadgets like smartphones and tablets; rather than hesitating, retailers like Whole Foods Market have stepped up and tried to integrate their product with the efficiency of the mobile application industry (Whole Foods Market, 2014).

As previously stated, it should be noted that now customers have more options than ever before regarding their personal choices. Food shopping is one of the more divisive types of shopping for many consumers, and consumers who choose to shop at places like Whole Foods Market are often very particular-- that is, they are very knowledgeable about the food that they are eating and the manufacturing aspect of their consumption. To handle this customer-savviness, Whole Foods Market and similar types of retail outlets must engage their customers in different ways. For instance, Whole Foods Market presents itself to its consumers in such a way as to appeal to the type of customer that supports locally-grown, responsible food production. The focus for Whole Foods Market, then, is to integrate this corporate identity-- the local, responsible, community-focused identity-- with the more globally-available, corporate identity that can be cultivated through the use of new technologies, like smartphone technologies (Buhamra, 2014). This is a fine balance that retailers like Whole Foods Market need to walk, and Whole Foods Market has been particularly successful in striking this type of balance.

Another way that food retail chains are reducing costs and improving

customer relations is the increasing automation of customer service (Buhamra, 2014). Although automation can be frustrating for certain types of customers, other types of customers appreciate the ease of automation, and striking a balance between in-person service and automation is appealing to younger, busier customers. Now and Next (2014) writes, “ Customer service costs money and is notoriously difficult to do well, so why not get customers to do it themselves? Everyone saves money and your customers think they’re in charge. Current examples include self check-in kiosks in airports, self-scanning machines in supermarkets and DIY check out services in hotels. Similarly, expect to see a boom in very intelligent vending machines very soon. If you prefer your service delivered by someone else, there’s even a car dealership in Japan that ‘ employs’ robots as salesmen” (Now and Next, 2014). While it seems unlikely that supermarkets in the United States will follow completely in the footsteps of Japan, some form of automation will probably continue to be popular in the name of efficiency in the United States.

Another interesting marketing and customer service trend that is not specific to any given retail organization but is interesting nonetheless in its implications is the concept of targeted marketing. Smartphones allow the customer and the store to integrate on a much closer level than ever before; sensors can be placed inside the store that communicate with the customer’s cell phone, providing them with specialized, targeted deals. While this may irritate some customers, it also may be an extra incentive for customers who are interested in daily deals and customer options that are unique to the stores at which the customer shops (Watson, 2014).

Technology has, undoubtedly, changed the face of customer service and marketing entirely. While it is difficult to anticipate exactly where the trends are heading in the future, there are a number of trends that seem to be continuing unabated; the integration of technology and customer experience is one of the most important. As technology becomes more advanced, people are more willing to integrate with customer service options in the places in which they shop. Speed, brand name recognition, and customer choice are also changing the way that the customer can and will interact with different brands. Customer desires and knowledge have changed as well, and the increasing amount of knowledge that the customer has has also changed the relationship between the customer and the business.

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