

RECRUITING FOR RETAIL SALES TODAY

5 Strategy Shifts for Greater Success

The employment of retail associates continues its downward trek, however, a [LinkedIn analysis](#) shows that sales still represents the most popular retail role, accounting for 29% of all retail roles in 2017. Historically low unemployment means the best associates will have good options within the industry or the ability to pursue a less volatile career path. Thus, the reality many brands face is fierce competition for retail associates alongside high turnover. Here's a look at the landscape and how retail employers can attract and retain sales associates in today's complex environment.

STRUGGLING TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN RETAIL ASSOCIATES.

29%

LinkedIn reports that while retail sales roles experienced a decline between 2013 and 2017—from 33% of all retail roles to 29%, respectively—they still account, by far, for the largest share of industry jobs.

Add in a tight labor market and high turnover, and it becomes easier to see why an industry known for shedding jobs is struggling to secure the talent it needs, particularly when it comes to retail associates. Digging deeper into LinkedIn's data, retail sales turnover reached 19.3% while only 35% of those who left a retail job remained in the sector. Driven away primarily by the industry's volatility, those who chose to leave did so to pursue administrative and customer service roles, and, not surprisingly given the youth of retail sales associates, to become a student. Attracting and retaining top sales associates in this atmosphere presents a challenge for even the most attractive retail brands.

TECHNICAL SKILLS GAIN IMPORTANCE AS THE JOB EVOLVES.

One of the biggest shifts within the job itself is that the integration of technology across all aspects of the retail industry means that sales associates need to cultivate technical skills in order to navigate everything from advanced point-of-sales systems to in-store tablet devices. A recent [Indeed.com survey](#) of retail employers highlights the challenge, noting that "70% of retail employers reported having difficulty finding in-store candidates with the appropriate technical experience, while 82% of retail employers expressed difficulty finding candidates with appropriate cross-functional experience."

A SHIFTING LANDSCAPE DEMANDS A SHIFT IN STRATEGY.

Taking these trends into consideration, retail recruiters should be looking for opportunities to adjust their organization's sales associate hiring strategy and to give store managers the expertise and support they need to be more effective.

Hire faster.

Speed is critical because good retail sales associates will have many options, and the first offer is often the one that wins. Recruiters should make sure that their processes and tools provide the support that's needed at the store level to hire quickly. For example, it's essential that your applicant tracking system (ATS) allows for workflows to be customized to reflect the store hiring process in addition to the corporate hiring process. Providing store managers with technology that supports their hiring process will help ensure consistent ATS usage at the store level, resulting in more efficient hiring practices and the ability to capture data that can be used to analyze which practices are producing the best outcomes—findings that can be shared with store locations nationwide to further improve success.



Don't forget that recruiting technology should also have AI-driven and automated features that will offer a competitive edge, such as the ability to identify talent currently working for your competitors and automatically invite them to apply to your organization. And, perhaps most importantly, your HR tech should include employee referral functionality, which you can adapt specifically for a retail sales associate referral program. Not only will those referrals result in higher quality candidates, but those you hire through referrals will also be more likely to stay.

Focus on career development.

If your organization continues to look at retail sales associates as a high-turnover role—as opposed to an entry point for exceptional talent—then it will never be more than that. Determine what the most viable career paths are, such as transitioning to customer service or logistics, and then work internally to structure career pathing programs accordingly.



Store managers will then be able to leverage career development opportunities as a means for attracting top sales associates. At the corporate level, make sure you're communicating employee stories that reflect career growth throughout your recruitment marketing communications.

Turn brand advocates into employees.



Retail has always known that its most committed customers are a strong source of potential talent. Point-of-sales communications have been the traditional method for communicating employment opportunities, but technology offers new avenues for encouraging customers to consider working for your company. Social media can be used to both identify your strongest advocates and to invite them to apply.

Create a talent community for alumni.

With high turnover rates as the norm, it's likely that many former employees may rethink their decision to leave at some point. Keep in touch with sales alumni so that you can re-recruit them when they're ready to make a change or to serve as a source of referrals. Their firsthand experience working at your organization makes them a good judge of who will fit your culture and be able to handle the demands of the job.

Extend flexibility to students.



Given the significant numbers of retail sales associates who quit when they begin college, there's tremendous opportunity to retain a high proportion of these individuals, even if it means they work fewer hours than they did previously. Undoubtedly, this will require some creative scheduling at the store level, but the time investment is well worth it when you think about the impact of a good sales associate on the business. So, encourage stores to accommodate students' class schedules even as they fluctuate from semester to semester—store managers may find an added benefit to this approach during busy holiday periods as students on break look to pick up extra shifts.

As with all industries, attracting, hiring and retaining talented and dedicated employees is no small task. Retail may be navigating a period of unprecedented change, but there are strategies and tools that employers can tap into to secure the retail sale talent needed to thrive in a highly competitive market.



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