

# SHOWROOMING

Retailers gripe about it, and pretty much all are victims. Here's some in-the-trenches advice on what can be done to alleviate and counter showrooming. *By Ann Loynd*

**Lester Wasserman, manager, Tip Top Shoes, New York, NY**

**The Scene:** It's definitely more of an issue than it was two years ago; you see far more people shopping on their phones. We're actively servicing them, sizing them, making suggestions. Yet younger consumers are so not used to what we do that they take it for granted. Sometimes they're doing it for price, other times because they want a color we don't have. But business is hard enough. People shouldn't be using us as a showroom. It lacks all morals.

**The Solution:** We always hang our hat on the fact that you're simply not going to get the level of service we provide anywhere else. But if we have a showroomer, our approach is to just be polite and end it as quickly as possible in the least offensive manner.

**Nicole Leinbach Reyhle, founder, Retail Minded**

**Truth Hurts:** Retail isn't what it used to be, which means that traditional expectations of how consumers should shop cannot be expected. Online influences often are what brings shoppers into physical stores in the first place. And if showrooming is a problem, consider why customers aren't purchasing from you. Is your store experience one they can't resist? Do you engage them so well that they want to return again and again? Is your product assortment ideal for your target audience? Or do you need to reconsider all these things and strengthen your overall store expectations?

**Roll Out the Red Carpet:** Begin by strengthening your brands, customer and retail connections. Using social

media, email, text messages, etc., connect the brands you sell to your target customers often. Additionally, embrace red carpet customer service, deliver outstanding in-store experiences and offer unmatched consumer engagement. Free shipping can't match stellar customer service and experience no matter how hard online merchants try to convince consumers otherwise. Combined with great products and the benefit of being a physical storefront, you will soon forget showrooming is an issue since you'll be too busy strengthening your customer service expectations.

**Gary Weiner, president, Saxon Shoes, Richmond, VA**

**The Onus:** If a customer is in our store, they are a shopper and potential buyer. If we have the product they want in stock, it usually leads to a sale. But if we don't, it's our fault.

**Kill them with Kindness:** If we come across a definite showroomer, it's our job to turn that customer into a sale. We suggest getting the item they are looking at while they are in stock. But you never know for sure if they are showrooming, so all you can do is be pleasant and provide exceptional service. There has been and will always be showroomers. A long time ago, we used to just call them shoppers!

**Bob Phibbs, CEO, The Retail Doctor**

**Reality Bites:** When someone pulls out a phone and scans something, you instantly think they are looking for a lower price. When it comes to Millennials, that's probably the case. However, they could just as easily be asking a friend what they think of that

style. Or, they are snapping a photo to consider whether to buy it later, or are getting information because the service in the store is so poor. Customers shouldn't have to put up with bad service when they've made a trip through traffic, weather, found a parking spot...Either respect the fact they chose to come to your store in the first place and service them exceedingly well, or prepare to be a showroom for retailers who make shopping convenient and fun, not work.

**Bite Back:** You can't just ask, "What size do you need?" and then go in the back, see if you have it and then either present it or tell the customer you don't have what they want. That isn't the customer's fault. Provide an exceptional experience to your shoppers—develop a rapport, use a Brannock device and position yourself as an expert.

**George Valdez, author and footwear retail expert**

**Mind Your EEEs:** Engage, educate and entertain. Your staff must engage. "Can I help you?" is the worst thing to ask a customer. You must be more conversational so you can connect. That leads to education—explain the features and benefits. Everybody thinks they're selling something someone needs. The only thing we need is water, food and air. Everything else is a want. You have to give them what they want. And always entertain. Treat them as a friend in your home. It's the principle of reciprocity: We've bonded, I've learned a lot and I wouldn't want to buy that online. Lastly, hire the personality and teach the skills.

**Denise Lee Yohn, author, What Great Brands Do**

**What Comes Around:** Reverse showrooming, or "webrooming," wherein customers research products online and then go to a store to purchase, is growing. According to a Harris poll, 69 percent of consumers webroom, while only 46 percent showroom.

**Be the Source:** Retailers must accept this behavior as a given and, rather than getting upset, embrace it and integrate it into the customer experience. Price is one piece of information. Details about features and materials, styling suggestions and care instructions are examples of other information customers seek. So make your website a vital source of information about the products you carry and, in-store, deliver personalized service, which is more valuable to many customers than saving a few dollars online.

**Catherine Boardman, owner, Shoes On King, Charleston, SC**

**It Happens:** We see showrooming on a regular basis, and have seen a slight increase in the past year. But we are thankful that the Charleston community engages in an ongoing campaign pushing shop local.

**What Happens:** We quietly verify and take showrooming on a case-by-case basis. We price match if an item is not turning and do not match if it's a best-seller. Also, the customer's approach and attitude factors in on our decision.

## SHOW ME THE NUMBERS

**67%** of brick-and-mortar shoppers check their smartphones in-store to find better pricing and **62%** ultimately buy online at a lower price. —Anderson Robbins Research

The apparel and accessories industry incurs a **43%** showrooming rate while the consumer electronics industry faces a **63%** rate and jewelry and watches incur a **16%** rate. —Statista

Shopper satisfaction is declining in stores up to **15%** a year. —IPG Media Lab

**57%** of showroomers are willing to purchase from brick-and-mortar stores that have a permanent price matching policy in place, and when consumers were asked what would keep them from showrooming, **84%** cited in-store sales and discounts. —Harris Interactive

**Mark Jubelirer, president, Reyers Shoes, Sharon, PA**

**Pulling No Punches:** I call showrooming "price jacking," and it angers me. While experts say if you can't compete on price, then offer better service. But service doesn't count for much these days. The consumer is now the expert. She knows what she wants and can buy it on her phone. And if it doesn't fit, she sends it back for free and they'll send another pair—quick. She can have it on her porch tomorrow, or even this very afternoon. Experts say to offer a range of sizes, as well. But that doesn't really matter as much, either. Few brands produce a broad size range—it's a mediums-driven landscape, where narrow feet slip and wides pinch. The meaning of "fit" has since been lost on generations of new consumers.

**Waiting Game:** Thanks to MAP pricing policies, showroomers will eventually discover that they can't find cheaper prices elsewhere. While they might find a size or color that I'm missing, they can allow us to special order it for them. In the meantime, our customers will continue to find their loyalty to us rewarded with competitive prices and superb service. And for those shoppers meandering around our store searching their phones for a better price, they might as well be playing Pokémon Go. •

