

# Norwegian retailers need to improve their customer service

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In Norwegian retail stores where customer service is poor, customers are less likely to buy, researchers also found.

Mystery shoppers, shoppers who secretly report on customer service and other aspects of the retail experience, have swooped through 245 different Norwegian stores on behalf of a Swedish research firm.

The staff at these stores had no idea that the shoppers were actually “spies.” But the technique gives chain stores important insights into how they can better serve their customers, and in so doing, improve sales.

## **Fantastic method**

"This is a great way to get an understanding of how a store's employees work," says Professor Asle Fagerstrøm at Westerdals Oslo School of Arts, Communication and Technology.

He believes the method of using mystery shoppers is far better than customer satisfaction surveys.

"Asking customers how satisfied they are does not always give a true picture of how well employees do their work," he says.

## **H&M and sports stores**

Everything from sports shops, clothing stores and furniture stores to pharmacies, electronics stores and building supply stores have been included in the survey. This year's survey is the sixth in the series.

The secret customers have spied in more than two hundred stores in 48 store chains from 10 different industries, including a number of well-known chain stores such as H&M and XXL.

Observers assessed customer service in five different stores from each chain.

“These kinds of investigations are coming back into fashion. In the 1980s, when SAS gave its employees courses on smiling, customer management was much more the focus in marketing,” Fagerstrøm said.

After a long period where retailers focused on technical solutions and logistics, companies are once again paying attention to the importance of how their employees treat customers.

## **Better at making contact**

Norwegian salespeople have become much better at interacting with customers compared to last year, the analysis shows.

While 76 per cent of salespeople made contact with customers last year, 96 per cent took active contact in this year's survey.

"Even though salespeople have been better at talking to customers about their needs over the past few years, they still haven't managed to get the customer to buy more," says Robert Eriksson from Daymaker, a Swedish company that assesses customer satisfaction and experiences in stores and that did the survey.

Here, Norwegian stores have untapped potential, he believes. Eriksson thinks this is more important than ever before.

"Stores that fail to provide good customer service with experienced salespeople will eventually lose to online stores," he says.

### **Decline in purchase decisions**

The Daymaker survey found that Norwegian salespeople have been less successful than last year in helping the customer decide what they want to buy.

Last year, salespeople managed to help customers make a final purchase decision in 14 per cent of cases where the salesperson first gave advice to the customer. This is a decline compared to 18 per cent last year.

These are situations where customers were in doubt about which product they would buy, and where the salesperson told the customer about differences between the products.

### **Shops are bad at additional sales**

Additional sales are when a salesperson suggests products to the customer that the customer did not initially come to the store to buy.

"Here it is important to question the customer. If salespeople don't do this, they are not paying attention to the customer's needs," says Eriksson.

While merchants achieved additional sales in 18 per cent of cases last year, they only succeeded in one out of ten cases in this year's survey.

"Here, stores can sell more by structuring the feedback they give to the salespeople," says Eriksson.

### **Optometry best industry**

The eyewear business is clearly best in Norway when it comes to total customer care. They scored 74 points on a scale of 100. Pharmacies and the electronics industry came second best, followed by sports stores.

"It is understandable that opticians scored the best, because the industry has had to adjust to survive the rise of internet shopping and is strongly competitive," says Fagerstrøm.

The building supply industry, the telecom industry, the furniture industry and shoe stores were in the middle of the pack when it came to customer service.

Clothing stores and department stores did the worst and scored 50 per cent on the scale.

The scale measures everything from customer contact to sharing product knowledge, suggesting concrete purchases and offering product trials.

Another category measured in the survey was customer satisfaction after visiting the store.

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 [If you want to be left undisturbed by salespeople while shopping in Norway, go to a shoe store, a new survey shows. Of course that's not good news for the storeowner, since the better service a customer gets, the more likely he or she is to buy something. \(Photo: colorbox\)](#) [6]

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