

Twist in the ‘(Re)tail’

Retail therapy is the order of the day. Still people ask, what is it about Retail that makes it so happening? What has made it one of the most sought after career options? And, what do they teach in a Retail course anyway? People asked me all sorts of questions when they heard that after completing my graduation from Mumbai I'm off to do a specialized course in Retailing and Merchandising Management. Well, truly speaking even I did not have the answer to any of these questions before I joined the course. But, once it was over I had answer to all of these and many more.

Retail, which is derived from a French word "*Retailier*," means 'to cut a piece off' or 'to break bulk'. In the Indian context this phenomenon has even more relevance as Retailers can be instrumental in providing the required storage infrastructure, establishing cold chains and ensuring that the goods reach the end consumer at the right place and at the right time. "Retail is a sector that has registered phenomenal growth, and is poised to grow even further" Megha Arora, Business Manager, Virtual Apparels Dehradun, affirms. The organized players bring a fresh air with brand new offerings at reduced prices. In a way, adding value to every transaction in which the end consumer is involved.

Today's customers are short of time and are always on a lookout for a one stop solution. And that is exactly what the hypermarkets and supermarkets provide them. A place where they can buy their month's grocery, a pair of jeans, a pair of formal shoes and even a computer game for their teenager. Customer demography is changing quickly and today's burgeoning middle class consumer is more than willing to spend, given the chance and choice, on items which are beyond his basic needs. For instance, entertainment and leisure are gaining importance in the life a common man who looks for a new destination to visit in every vacation.

Having said that, the Indian Retail industry has its share of concerns ranging from lack of infrastructure to dominance of unorganized retailers over the consumer's mind. But, the biggest of them of all is clearly the lack of skilled manpower. "Along with this explosive growth comes the greatest concern of the industry - quality manpower" says Megha, visibly perturbed "training sets a standard of professional excellence and quality and provides a consistent, definable, repeatable process for the retailers."

In metros and Tier I cities a large number of international brands are combating for the customer's wallet share. "Some of the stores tend to stand out in your memory and the factor which influences the same is the kind of service that you encountered in that store," observes Ashrita Goyal, Reliance Trends, New Store Opening Head, North India. Though, it is not just the cities which have been hit by this sudden retail phenomenon. Even smaller towns rural areas are catching the eye of large companies. Rural India already has a few examples to boast about such as Godrej Agrovet, ITC's Coupal Sagar and DSCL's Kisan Hariyali Bazaar. For these retailers it is imperative to have skilled

manpower to get an edge over the competition by providing superior service. As Rajeev Karwal, Founder Director- Milagrow, puts it “Retail is the most consumer facing business of all consumer facing businesses. Training makes all the difference to having a profit making or a loss making store”.

How does Retail make a feasible career option? Well, having talked about the various factors (which are just the tip of the iceberg) pushing Retail growth in India it is evident that this industry is here to stay. Hence, once the growth plans of companies come to life the number of people required in the Retail industry would be tremendous. Like any other sector there are a number of fields (as opposed to the common myth that retailing is synonymous with marketing) in Retail which one can opt for. One can choose from Retail Operations, HR, finance, merchandising/buying, visual merchandising and marketing. Once in the industry, there are lot of avenues for growth and personal enhancement.

But, the question that we are asking is, can training really make a difference? “The store staff should be trained not just about the product knowledge but should also be given insights about retail terminology such as cross-selling, up-selling, FAB (features-advantages-benefits) et al which enhance the consumer’s overall shopping experience” responds Ashrita Goyal.

Megha from Virtuaal looks for defined traits such as, “One needs to be organized, reliable, trustworthy, a good leader as well as take directions well, good communications skills, like to help people, patient, listen well, polite, have good math skills, able to delegate, able to train and motivate a staff, and able to work hard,” when hiring a suitable employee. “Also high ethical standards, a good team player, and knowing when to have fun are also important. They should also enjoy dealing with the public and have enthusiasm and interest in their merchandise” she adds.

Even though, growth is not a constraint in this rapidly escalating industry but Ashrita has a word of caution for all “It is important to work and the store level for sometime and then move your way up the corporate ladder,” she says, “once an individual has a grip of activities such store layout, complaint handling and other factors that provide a comprehensive understanding of in-store experience can he add value to the organization as well as the customers he deals with.”

A person can choose as per his or her skills and interest as to which field he would like to go for in Retail. For instance if someone is good with numbers and has strong negotiation skills then the person should go for a buyer or merchandiser profile while someone who is good at building relationships with people should opt for store operations. “Training should be a continuous process and should be more on the job by presenting real life solutions in front of the store staff and helping them identify the best way to tackle it,” insists Ashrita. Someone who is keen on research and has strong analytical skills should go for Retail operations while a person with a creative bent and a nose for innovative ideas would be perfect fit for visual merchandising. “An analytical ability is an added advantage for young aspirers,” says Ashrita, “along with the ability to learn quickly, for instance, the various software that retail professionals need to work on.”

“Youngsters who want to join this business must not just go for the glitter,” Karwal recommends “Retail is a business in which people must have an eye for detail. They must be willing to stick in it for a long time and not just enter to enjoy for some years of their youth.” Megha Arora resounds a similar viewpoint “someone interested in building a career in retail should first take a formal training to understand the trade and know about management and sales techniques.”

Retail industry has room for all and in fact, the industry leaders are even anticipating a crisis in the availability trained manpower if the retail industry grows as per the projections. “Moving up from a store executive level to a manager level is not a very long journey, though, you would have to prove your mettle thereon to achieve further growth” points Ashrita. This infant industry already has a number of examples of ‘men of substance’ who “have risen from the bottom of the pyramid to the very top” in Rajeev Karwal’s words.

- **Vivin Wason**

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