

The 2018

Holiday playbook:

Increasing sales at retail



The holidays can bring hives for retailers and brands.

The expectations are enormous, the opportunities even bigger, and the possibilities of missing goals are very real.

We surveyed more than 1,500 consumers, retail leaders, and retail sales associates on their holiday shopping preparations, and the results are clear: there's a significant disconnect between what consumers want, how retail leaders prepare, and what sales associates need. For brands and retailers

the stakes are too significant to let consumers — and potential sales — fall through the cracks during this high-traffic, high-volume time.

We'll uncover what consumers expect from a good holiday shopping experience, how retail leaders allocate resources to prepare for the busy season, why sales associates aren't getting the tools they need to drive sales, and how to fix the problem.

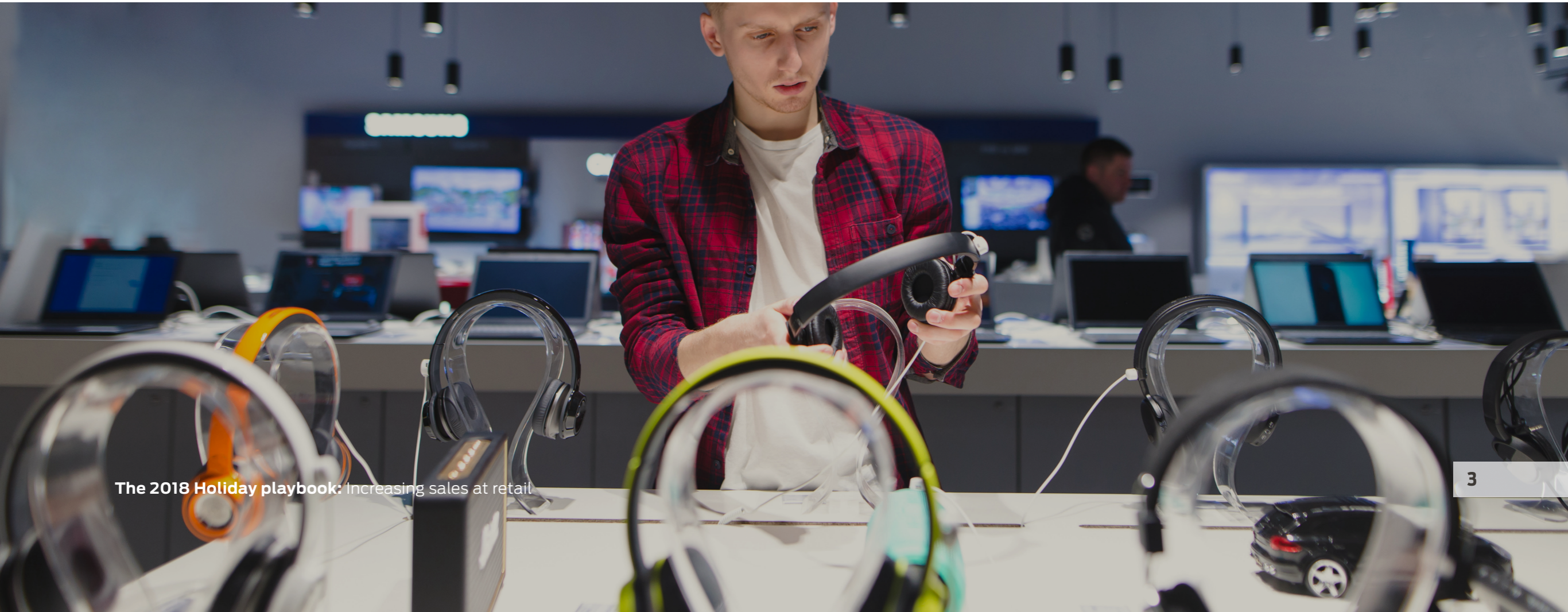
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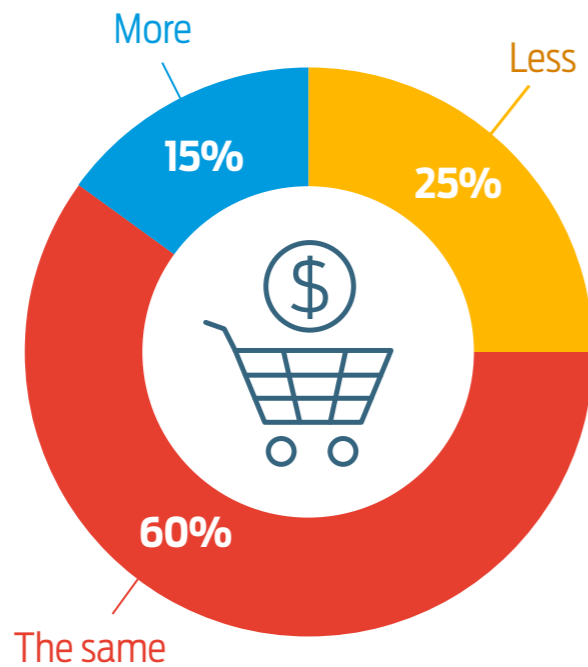
What consumers expect



What will consumers spend?

When considering this holiday season, 75% of consumers plan to spend at least the same amount as they spent in the 2017 holiday season, with 15% anticipating to spend even more on holiday shopping.

Thinking about the holiday season, do you expect to spend more or less this year compared to last year?

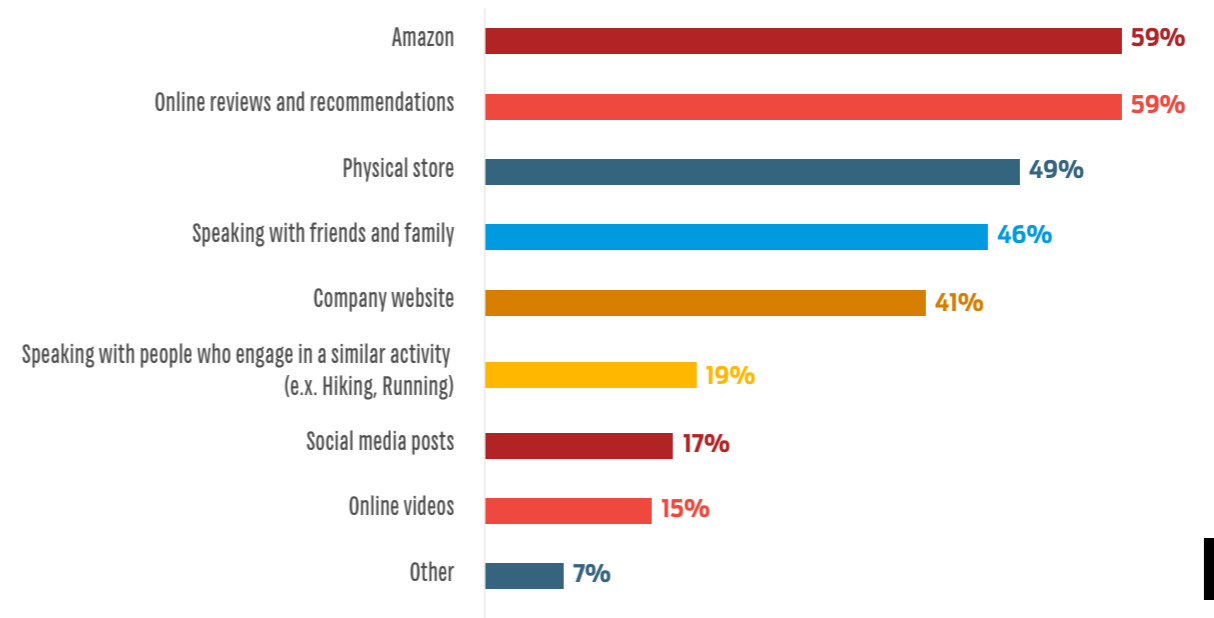


The 2018 Holiday playbook: Increasing sales at retail

Where do consumers research?

In order to better understand how consumers prepare for the busy shopping season, we asked them about their research habits. 6 in 10 say they research products specifically through Amazon, presumably because of the robust reviews. It's not just the tech specs that are important to consumers — they need to know details, the finer points of a product to feel confident in that purchase. Something else we interpret from this data is that many consumers consult friends and family, and nearly half do their research in a physical store location. Take heart: brick-and-mortar is alive and well.

Thinking about the holiday season, where will you go to research new products before purchasing?

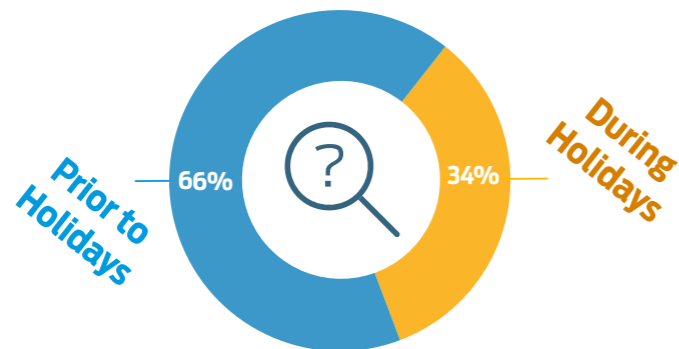


When do consumers begin their holiday shopping?

Because holiday shopping is a time when consumers generally spend more money in a shorter amount of time — and because many of those purchases are high consideration items, such as electronics — consumers plan ahead. According to the National Retail Federation’s 2017 Holiday Playbook, 54% of consumers begin researching a product intended for a holiday purchase as early as October. In fact, 33% of consumers are already purchasing during that early time.

When ExpertVoice asked consumers about shopping during Thanksgiving weekend, as many as 66% stated they will primarily purchase items they’re already aware of — and have already researched — prior to beginning of the holiday shopping season.

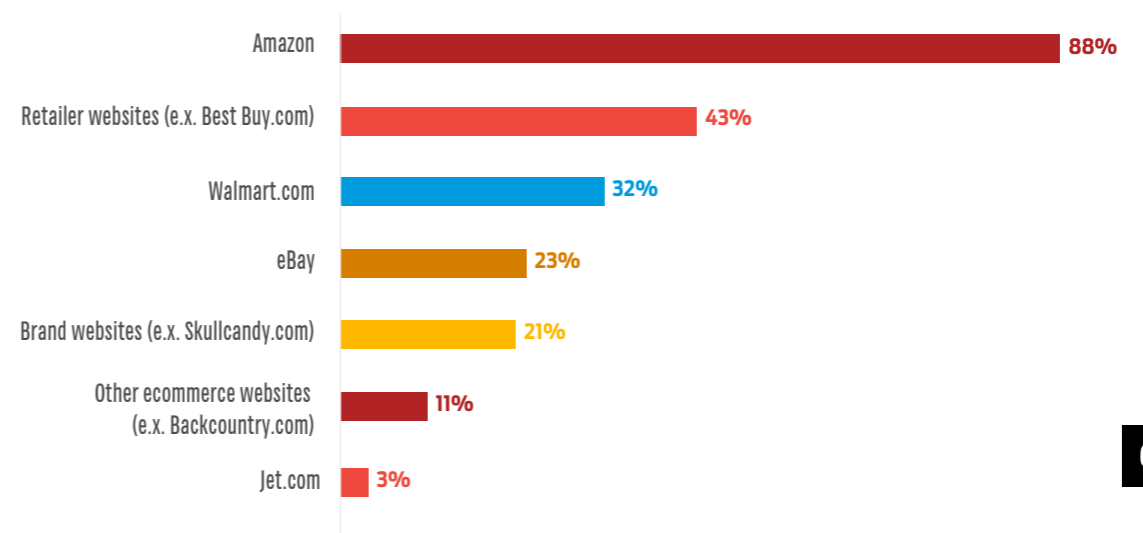
Thinking about shopping during Thanksgiving weekend, when did your research occur?



What does this mean for brands and retailers?

While preparing retail associates who work the sales floor is important, it’s not enough. 72% of consumers plan to split their holiday budget between online and offline, which requires brands and retailers to invest in an omnichannel strategy, with associates prepared to assist wherever they are found. This high-traffic shopping time is the perfect opportunity to engage consumers, and provide them with the confidence they need to make a purchase.

If you plan to shop online during Thanksgiving weekend, where do you plan on shopping? Select all that apply.



What price point constitutes research?

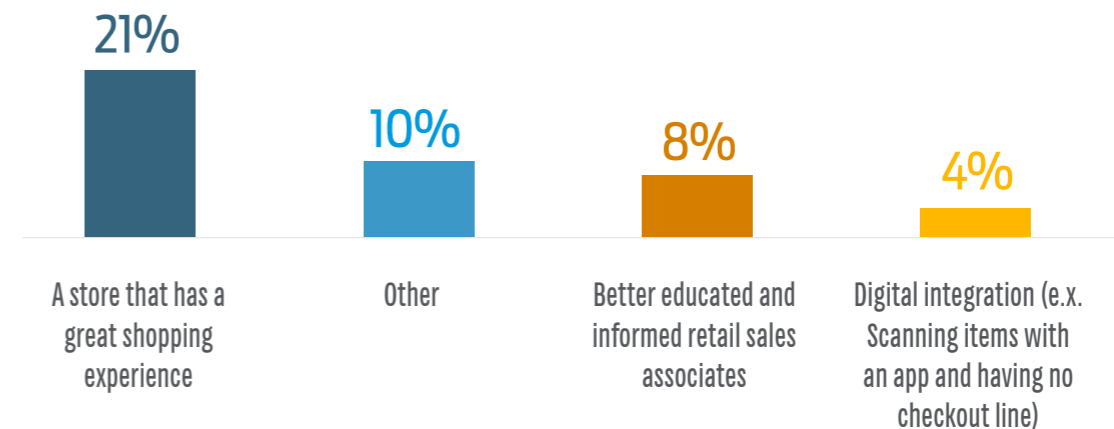
While there's no question that a considered purchase is often, well, considered, a surprising 66% of consumers actually invest the time to research a product that costs less than fifty dollars. 85% research products that range from \$50-100, and 89% of consumers — a healthy majority — research any product that will cost more than \$100. For brands and locations who carry higher priced items, you can feel confident there will be a significant amount of thought and research put into the products you sell.

“66% of consumers actually invest the time to research a product that costs less than \$50”

What motivates a purchase?

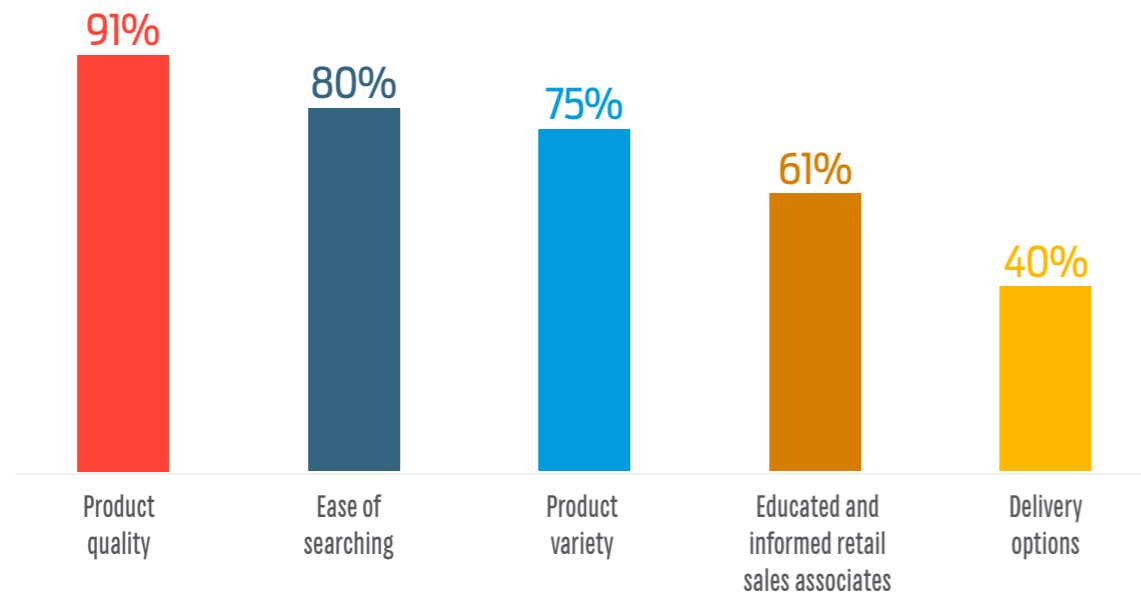
“4 in 10 consumers are incentivized by something besides a discount”

Purchasing many gifts during the holidays can be financially straining, which is why it's no surprise that consumers look for a good deal, but 4 in 10 consumers are incentivized by something besides a discount. A good shopping experience, educated RSAs, a wide product selection, and even a little holiday spirit all contribute to the consumer shopping in a physical retail store.



91% of consumers state that a product's quality is the most important attribute when shopping in a retail store during the holiday season, while 6 in 10 consider educated and informed retail sales associates to be important to their shopping experience.

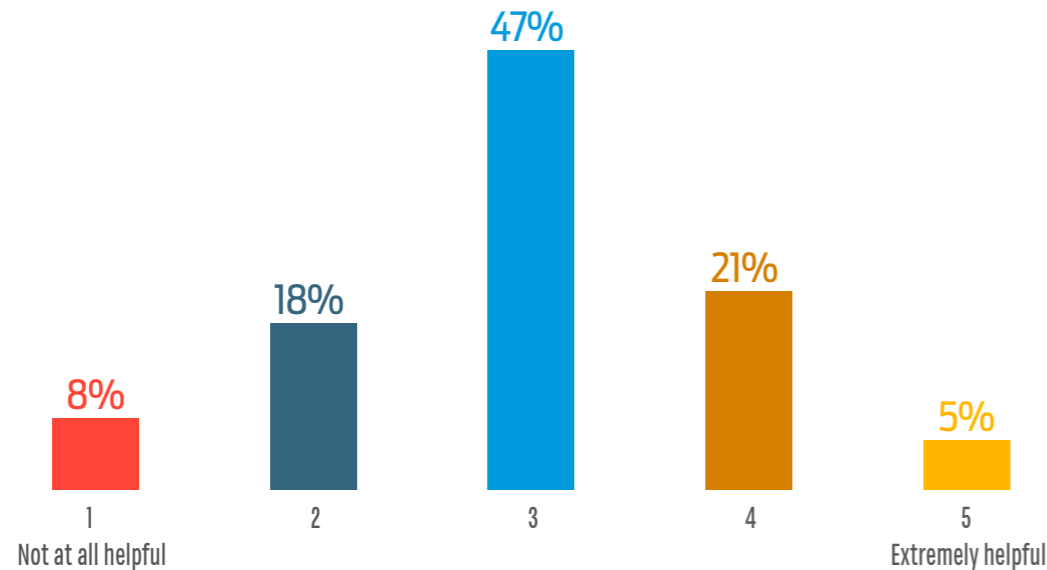
Thinking about the holiday season, which of the following would be most likely to incentivize you to shop at a physical retail store?



The latter statistic is one we must focus on, because while more than half of consumers see retail sales associates as valuable, only 24% of consumers state that helpful service contributes to a purchase.

In fact only 22% trust sales associates for advice on what to buy, and only 26% of consumers find RSAs helpful during the holidays.

Thinking about the holiday season, how helpful are retail sales associates?



These numbers are extremely concerning for both brands and retailers, but there is hope. Past customer data shows it's not all retail sales associates who aren't trusted; just those who aren't knowledgeable about the products they sell. In a previous study, ExpertVoice partnered with Jonah Berger from the Wharton School and Engagement Labs to determine if an educated influencer's (like a retail sales associate) recommendation led to a purchase. They found that 82% of consumers are more likely to try or buy a product recommended by educated retail sales associates and other similar influencers.

In other words: consumers trust people who know what they're talking about. In fact, 8 in 10 value a retail sales associate who has knowledge about the products they sell, and 30% want product advice from a knowledgeable retail sales associate.

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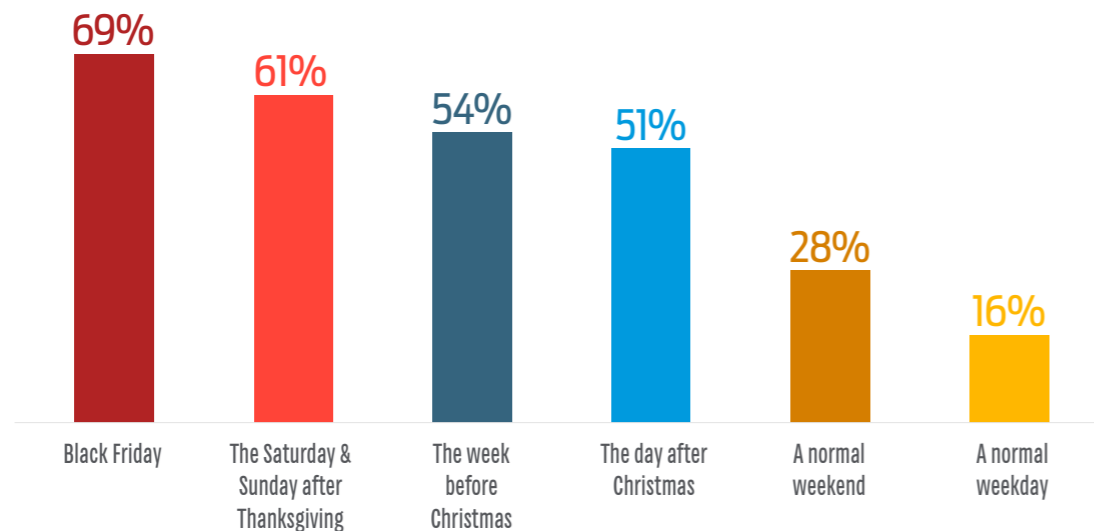
Consumers are looking for help

Because we were curious, we asked the consumer panel how difficult it is to find a retail sales associate during different times of the year. It's not surprising, but nearly three-fourths of consumers struggle to get assistance on Black Friday, and more than half find it challenging to get any help the week prior to Christmas. As these are critical dates to increase sales, it's important to make sales associates more readily available to maximize the recommendations they provide.

In the next two sections we'll consider all of this data through the lens of the retailers, brands, and retail associates themselves, and discuss how brands and retailers can best prepare their teams to increase sales during the holiday season.

When shopping in a store, how difficult is it to get a hold of a retail sales associate at the following times?

*Percent saying difficult or extremely difficult



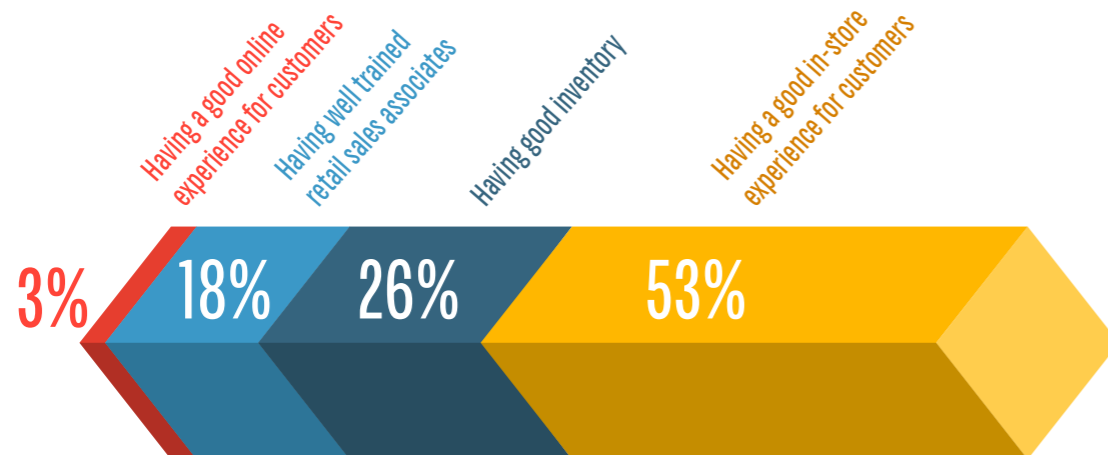


How retail leaders prepare

53% of retail leaders — store managers and supervisors —

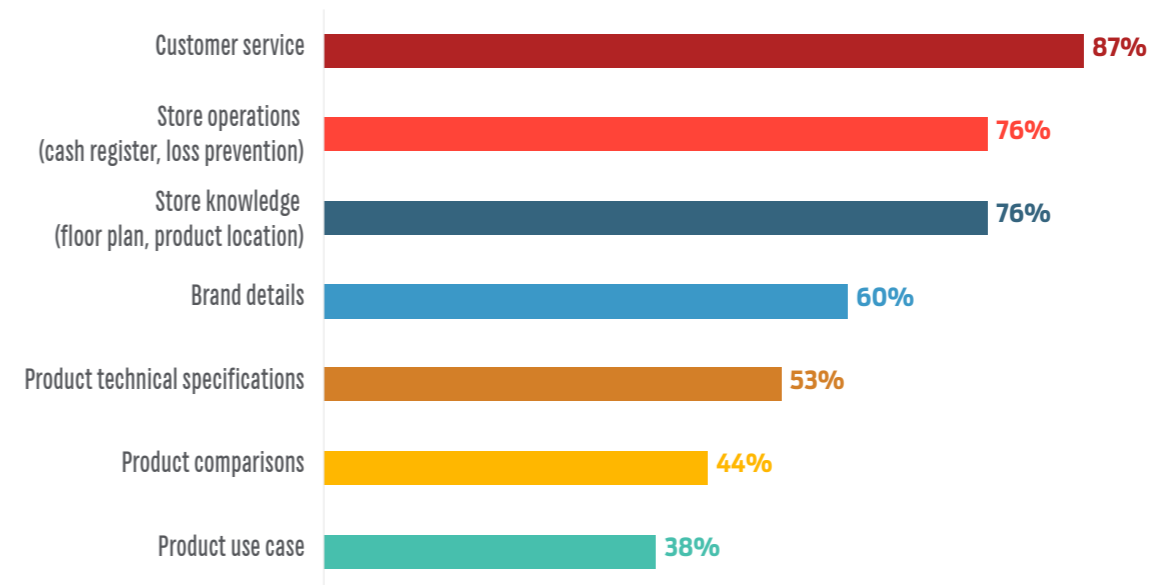
state that the single most important factor to achieving their organization's holiday goals is a good in-store experience for customers, and 26% believe having well-trained retail sales associates will help them accomplish those goals.

Which of the following is the single most important factor for achieving your organization's holiday goals in brick and mortar?



When we break down how retail leaders prepare their employees, 87% state they train their retail sales associates on customer service, 76% on both store operations and store knowledge, and 60% on brand details.

During the holidays, what does your company train your retail sales associates on?



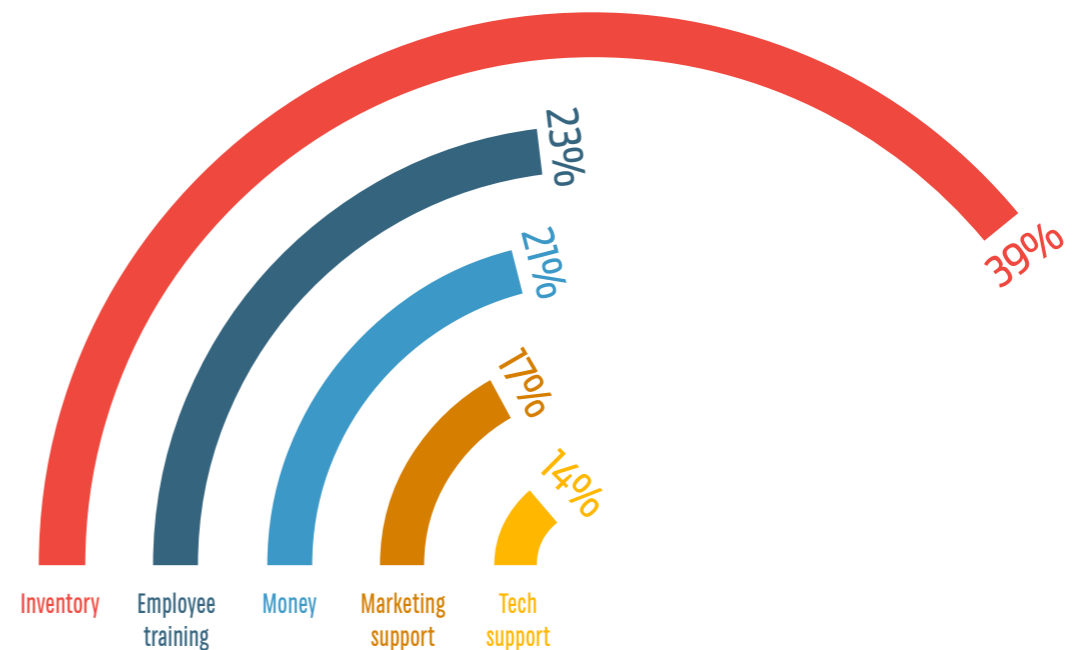
Despite the in-store experience being a priority, and despite putting incredible emphasis on customer service, retail leaders state that only 23% of total resources are put toward training. And only 38% say they train retail sales associates on product use case.



...only 23% of total resources are put toward training...

With such a high percentage of consumers who feel that retail sales associate are either not helpful or not trustworthy, retailers and brands must revisit how they train their team. These individuals have the potential to exponentially increase sales. According to a [study by Marshall Fisher](#), also of the Wharton School, educated retail sales associates sell 9.5% more than their counterparts who have not trained on the products they sell.

What percentage of your organization's resources do you put toward brick and mortar sales during the holiday season?



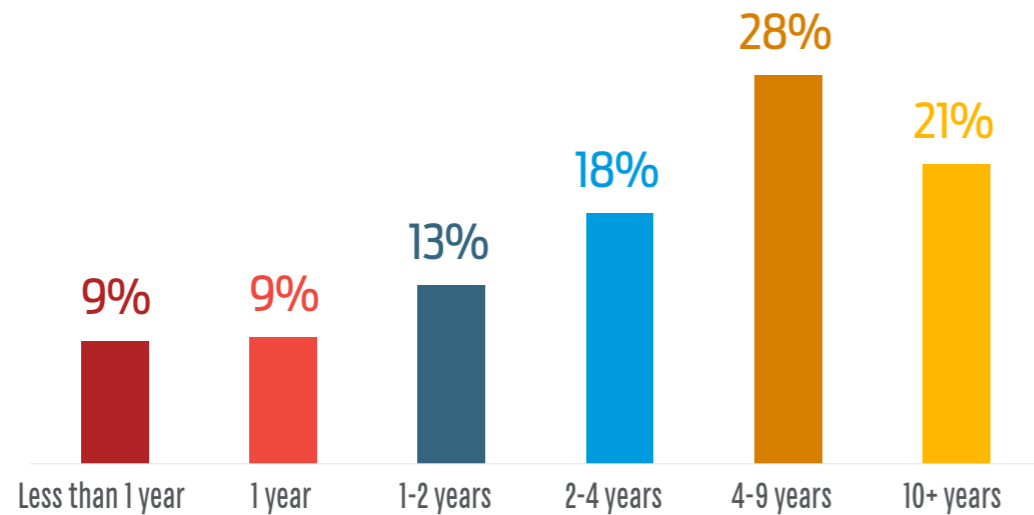
A person wearing a plaid shirt is holding a smartphone over a table. On the table, there are several sheets of paper with fashion design sketches, including a jacket and various fabric swatches. One sheet features a QR code and the word "Sale".

Why sales associates aren't ready

The most important players in a consumer’s holiday shopping experience are the retail sales associates. And these particular retail sales associates we surveyed happen to be sales floor veterans: 67% have worked in retail for at least 2 years, with 49% having worked retail in excess of 4 years.

How long have you worked in retail?

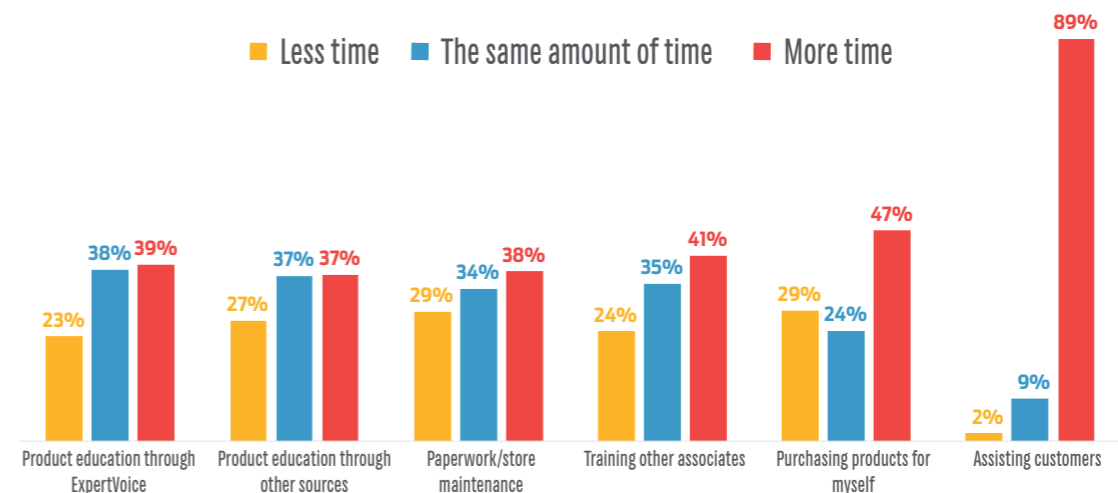
*Tenure in years



It isn’t easy to be a retail sales associate during the holiday season. 83% of them don’t receive commission*, and 84% don’t receive incentives to sell more during the holidays. Their potential, however, is untapped if they aren’t given the tools they need to be successful: product experience and training.

This need for a trained and educated sales associates is especially crucial during the holiday season. 89% state they spend the majority of their time assisting consumers — conversations that lead to purchases.

Please indicate how your time allocation changes during the holiday season.

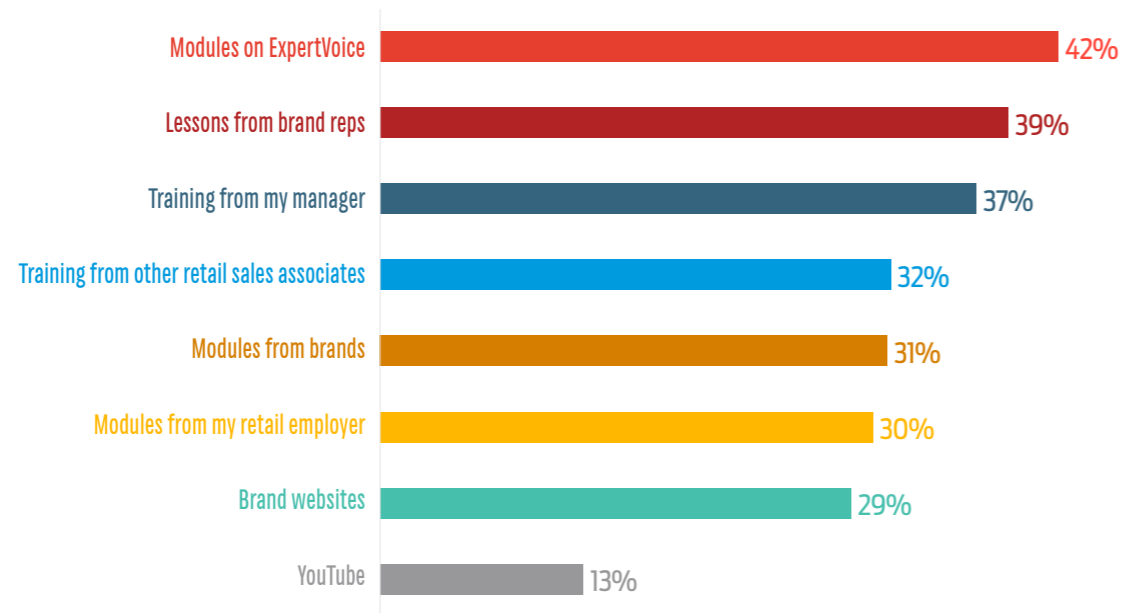


*Survey respondents reflect the retail sales associates found on the ExpertVoice platform

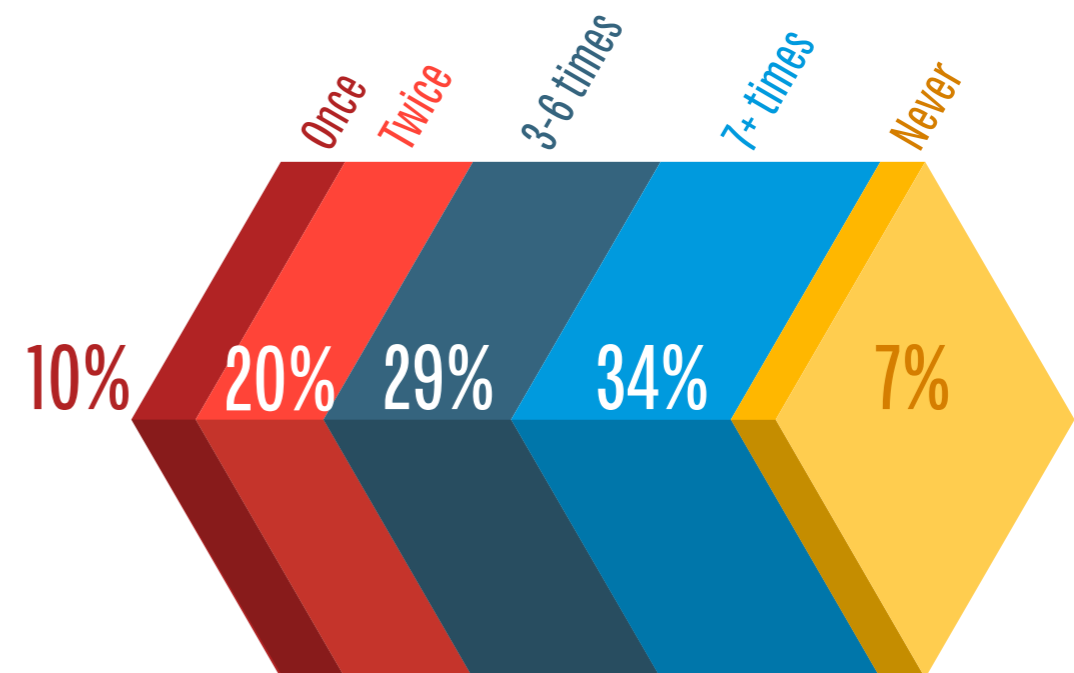
When asked how they prepare, 39% of sales associates cite lessons from brand reps, 37% receive training from a manager and 32% are trained by other sales associates — which is only beneficial if the trainer herself has the proper foundation.

It's great to see that many respondents are trained by brand reps, however 59% of sales associates see brand reps — from any of the hundreds of brands sold in a given store — only 6 times or fewer in an entire year. With so many locations to visit, scaling education from a brand rep is enormously difficult to do.

How do you prepare to sell during the holiday season?



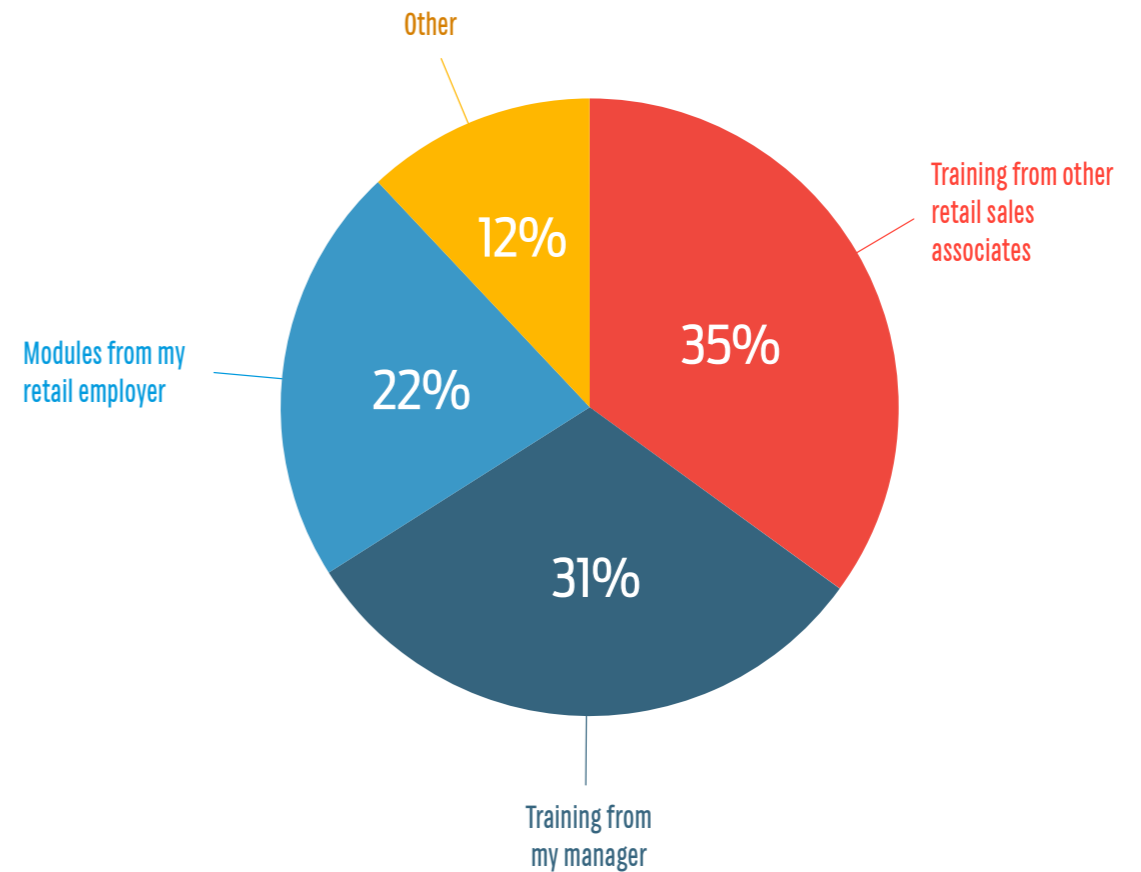
How often do brand reps visit your store during an average year?



When considering how new hires are prepared to sell, 35% state new hires are trained by fellow retail sales associates, trained 31% by managers, and only 8% state they interact with brand-specific content. Because consumers are either neutral or negative on retail sales associates, it's imperative that brands and retailers increase interactions with brand-specific content to improve the quality of assistance and recommendations. Otherwise consumers will continue to struggle with trusting these associates. On the other hand, the associates who have experience and knowledge about a brand, its products, and their industry are significantly more valuable to consumers.

It's imperative that brands and retailers increase interactions with brand-specific content.

How does your store prepare new hires to sell during the holiday season?



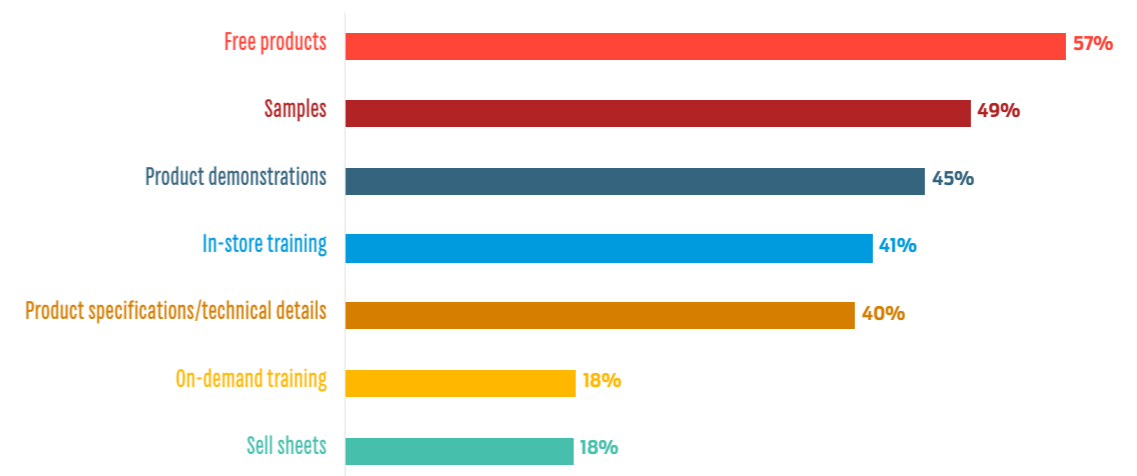
Next steps for brands and retailers

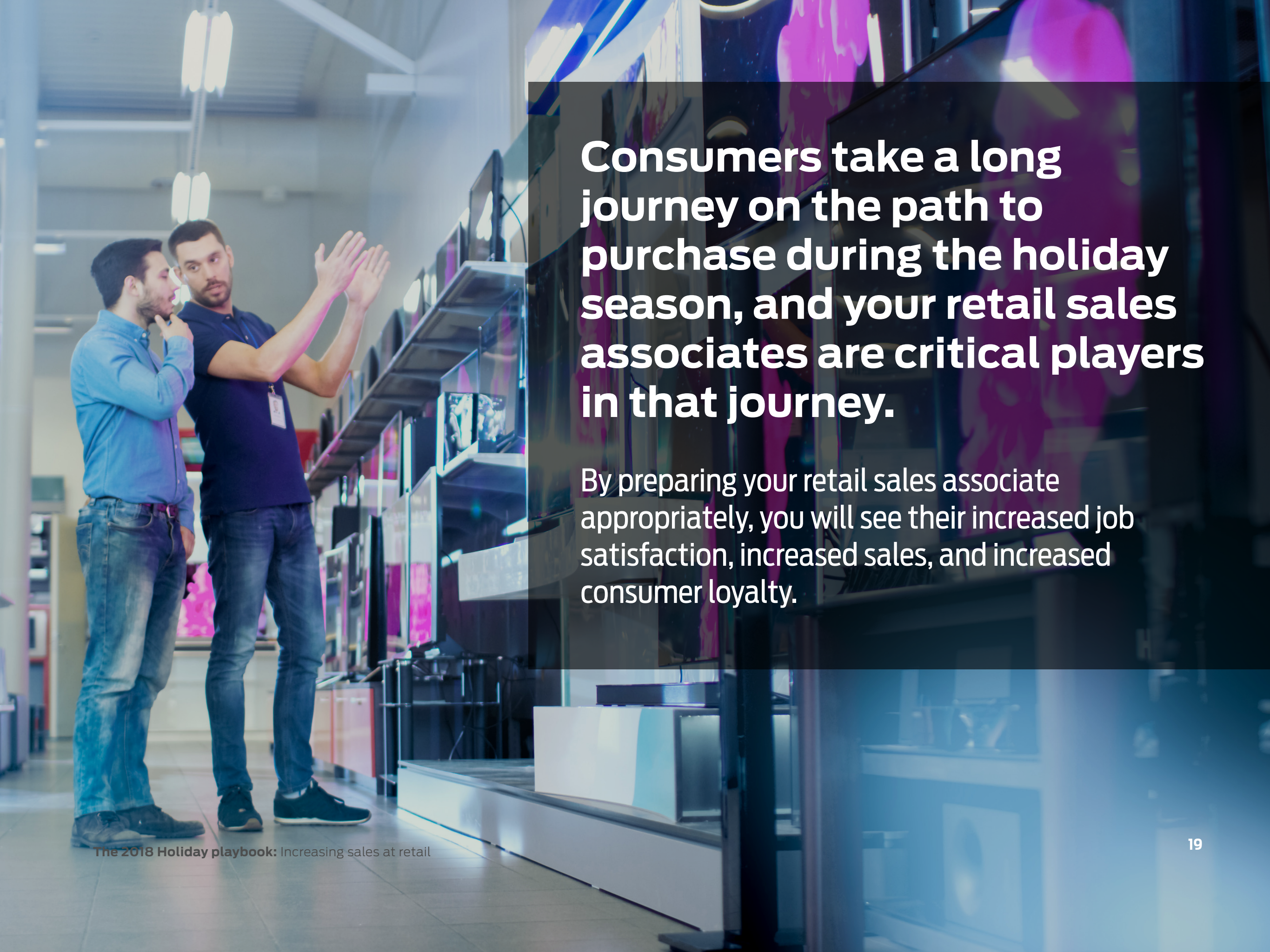
Consumers want knowledgeable retail sales associates to assist them, and retail sales associates want to be better prepared. Although many of these associates aren't commission sellers, there's no doubt that being better prepared makes for a more enjoyable, and more fulfilling work experience.

Here are three things you can do today to see increased sales this holiday season:

- 1. Make training a priority.** Train sales associates throughout the year, but kick it into gear in the third quarter. Because more than half of consumers begin research in October, sales associates need to be ready to answer their questions and make recommendations.
- 2. Give them access to brand and product training.**
- 3. Provide access to discounted or seeded products.** The majority of the sales associates surveyed want more access to products. The more experience they have with your products, the more likely they are to provide educated recommendations to consumers looking for advice on what to buy.

What do you wish you had more of from brands or brand reps during the holiday season to help you sell more products?



A photograph of two men in a retail store. The man on the left is wearing a light blue button-down shirt and jeans, looking towards the man on the right. The man on the right is wearing a dark blue polo shirt and jeans, gesturing with his hands as if explaining something. They are standing in front of a large display of televisions. The background shows more shelves with products and a modern retail environment.

Consumers take a long journey on the path to purchase during the holiday season, and your retail sales associates are critical players in that journey.

By preparing your retail sales associate appropriately, you will see their increased job satisfaction, increased sales, and increased consumer loyalty.



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About the author

Jen Robinson is the Content Strategist at ExpertVoice. Jen enjoys traveling the world, cooking with her husband, and getting as much sleep as one can with a young infant.