

Kiss My Aster

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I Don't Work Here ... Do You?

Amanda Thomsen



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A new study was just released that tells us that, overall, people don't want to be bothered by a salesperson during their retail shopping experience. Nearly 3,000 people were surveyed for this study and the results showed 95% of those polled want to be completely ignored while getting their retail therapy on. The overall desire that shoppers feel to just browse in peace has brought us to where we are: self-checkout lanes, InstaCart, thriving Internet sales of just about everything and the magic that is Amazon Prime.

When shopping on the Internet, they can easily comparison shop, read about the features and benefits, and never ever get a shock at the register because the shopper is behind the wheel at all times. They can even do their shopping at midnight from the bathtub while eating pretzels. I mean, I would NEVER EVER do that, of course. (It's nice because if you get crumbs on you, you can wash them right off.)

But something smells like fish emulsion about this study:

1. Have you ever read a review for ANY retail store, ever? It's alllll about being helped or not, from grocery stores to hardware stores. I'd love to see a study where participants read two reviews for the same store, one with attentive customer service and one where they're ignored and see which would draw a person to shop there. I'm willing to put money on the fact that they want a place with great customer service, just not in their face. Like it's available, but only if it's summoned, psychically. Good customer service can still make or break any retail establishment; the rules are just changing for what that is and where to apply it.
2. I think all bets are off when your retail establishment is a garden center. Many customers are there solely for the individual time and attention they receive. I think this study isn't one-size-fits-all, so keep getting in those customers' faces (this should be judged on a case-by-case basis though).
3. If garden center employees aren't at least greeting customers, how will the customers ever find workers if they need one? Because of varying uniforms and weather-related uniform coverings, it can be tough to tell who's an employee and who isn't. There needs to be some sort of connection made so that the customer has options if they want to buy a giant b&b tree, if they fall in a drainage ditch or if they have a sudden urge to indignantly ask if this variegated spike (*Dracaena marginata*) is GMO.
4. If all employees hung out in an "ask for help here" hut, that would work, except no watering, stocking or pricing

would get done. We need to make connections with our customers while still getting it all done.

5. If being left alone is really what people want, whyyyyyyy do people ask me for help every time I visit a garden center? I'm usually dressed in a vintage party dress with a giant purse and 6-year-old in tow and I'll still get asked if I can load their car for them. I also get asked at Home Depot and one time I was wearing a red shirt at Target and you KNOW I got asked how much that box of wine was. I said, "I don't work here ... but there's a price scanner right over there." We scanned it together and it was a good price, so I brought home a box, too.

I love scientific studies and polls, but this one seems to miss the mark for what we know to be true for this industry. But still, the rules are changing and that's something we can't ignore. **GP**

Amanda Thomsen is a regular columnist in Green Profit magazine. You can find her funky, punky blog planted at KissMyAster.com and you can follow her on Facebook, Twitter AND Instagram @KissMyAster.