

# Why customers choose you

Being chosen by consumers and staff is the result of a complex set of variables, however there are definite similarities in thought and action between those retailers who have proven their success over and over again.



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Recently I attended a conference on retailing and heard presentations from a variety of speakers focused around the identification of emerging retail trends around the world. One particular presentation was by Martin Butler, author and lecturer specialising in retail, marketing and branding.

He has recently written a book called *The Art of Being Chosen: Secrets of success from the giants of retail*. There were some insightful points that he makes about the commonalities that can be seen in some of the great retailers around the world and how they see their marketing and customer service and general 'offer'. These global themes and strategies are applicable to community Pharmacy, albeit on a smaller scale.

The major premise was that good retailers know precisely what business they're involved with in order to be chosen. And the business that retailers are in is often not the most obvious one. Starbucks contend that they are not in the coffee business; they are in the people business selling coffee. Plenty of businesses are selling the same thing but if you want to be chosen before others, the way you sell those same products needs to be unique to survive. To not only survive but thrive as a business, you need to emotionally engage your audience and this extends to staff not just customers.

Another concept that was a commonality among the best retailers was 'trust'. In fact a business can't continue to operate long without trust – retailers need to be trusted to be chosen, particularly for repeat business. Trust is the basis of a relationship, be it with general consumers, customers, staff or management. This kind of 'through-the-line' trust is not easy to receive or maintain. Ian MacLaurin and Terry Leahy, the architects of the new

Tesco state that: "Our core purpose is: to create value for customers to earn their lifetime loyalty" and they authentically live by that to earn customers' trust. Banks used to be the most trusted institutions around the world and through dubious integrity and actions have become one of the more vilified. Ensuring that each contact with customers builds trust, especially in a healthcare setting, is crucial to success.

The best retailers also know who their best customers are. You won't be able to please every customer, but it is important to please the ones who mean the most to your business. Communication directed at engaging your most valuable customers is seen as an imperative and one that I have certainly seen work in the pharmacies that adopt this philosophy. An important related concept is that, philosophically, your most important customer in retail is actually the one serving the paying customer ie. your staff. If your staff are not 'buying what you're selling' you are potentially in real trouble.

Your staff need to be an active part of the selling and marketing process of your business. They need to be educated (not just trained to fulfil a series of acts, as Mike Gould, Chairman & CEO of Bloomingdales passionately believes) so that they can offer a solution to your valuable customers. They need to have the tools and ability to assess a situation and decide on how to best help the customer address their need to secure both the sale and the customer's ongoing loyalty. Good staff members are inherently passionate about giving good customer service (another speaker at the conference referred to retailing as being a vocation or a 'calling' and it sure feels like you need faith sometimes!) and securing the best outcome for the business. In fact, throughout the

conference, whether the presenters were discussing retail design, marketing, merchandising or even pricing there was a continuous emphasis on how important staff, in particular front-line staff, are to the presentation and adoption of your offer.

Another key area of commonality is the concept of knowing your competitor, yet somehow staying ahead of competitors not through mimicry but by playing your own game. In this way, true retail visionaries are not looking at what their actual competition is doing, rather they are trying to unlock the unrealised potential in their own business. This can be seen that they view their primary limitation as being their future vision of themselves and whether this is limiting or suitably expansive enough to enable and secure growth. Working intertwined with this expansive vision is the creation, nurturing and adoption of ideas. Ideas are at the core of any exceptional business and the lifeblood of innovation and growth. In a world of ever changing communication, every retailer needs to be open and encouraging of new ideas, but also have the ability to sift through the numerous new concepts and focus on the ones that have the most impact and potential for business growth.

The real strength in Butler's approach is the idea of creating the ideal environment (from product selection, presentation, marketing, and customer service) that enables your product or service to be chosen above your competitors. Even the smallest pharmacy can benefit and look at how they compare in the areas of: knowing your strategy, building trust with your audience, knowing your best customers, the importance of making staff able to create solutions for customers, keeping ahead of your competition and knowing the value of a good idea. **.Rp**



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Robert Turner – Community Pharmacist and Pharmacy Catalyst Director

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