

Consumer Corner

Survey Says!...Today's Buyers Favor Smaller, Local Retailers

(NAPSA)—If you're one of the more than 2.5 million small retailers in the United States, there's good news for you. A recent Con-Stat survey found that two-thirds of U.S. shoppers prefer local, independent retailers over large chains.

When the buying public is shopping for unique gift items, collectibles, hobby and craft supplies, and beer, wine and liquor, it strongly favors a local retail community, according to the survey. Respondents listed convenience, unique merchandise, a comfortable atmosphere, personalized service, knowledgeable employees, faster checkout, high product quality, and unique packaging and gift wrapping as key factors in their preference for smaller retailers.

While those are attributes most large chains can't offer, it's still tough to make it as a small, independent retailer. Just consider Dani Lingerie, a single-location specialty retailer that rents space at a mall where one of the other tenants is a highly visible national lingerie chain—and Dani Lingerie's most visible competitor.

Dani Lingerie delivers highly personalized service with pizzazz. The store offers personalized customer service, and shoppers are often served by the owner's mother, described as a cross between Goldie Hawn and Lucille Ball. The business survives—and thrives—by delivering on its customers' expectations for a unique experience.

Tips for Building

Your Competitive Edge

Although the survey results represent great news for small retailers such as Dani Lingerie, respondents said national chains were doing a better job than small local retailers in two key areas: direct marketing and inventory management. Fortunately, there is a tool that helps level the playing field in these areas: retail-specific point-of-sale (POS) technology.

Affordable POS solutions on the market today, geared in price and functionality toward small retailers, pack a solid punch in areas critical to success. For example, in the area of direct marketing, POS technology solu-



New point-of-sale technology can help small retailers compete with their larger competitors.

tions give small retailers a leg up, allowing them to track everything from a customer's favorite china pattern to his or her preference on how to receive information about upcoming sales.

"It's important when considering and implementing a POS solution that retailers keep the customer in mind," said Brendan O'Meara, general manager for Retail Management System at Microsoft Business Solutions. "Small retailers set themselves apart through exceptional customer service and a unique experience; POS technology should simply enhance what is already a distinct differentiation."

Not only can POS technology enhance the customer's experience, it also can improve store operations. Inventory management is one example of the operational benefits of POS technology, and one that affects customers positively as well.

With POS technology, small retailers can move from handwritten inventory notes to automated inventory management, ensuring that store managers always have access to current inventory data. In addition, companies with multiple stores can track inventory at each store, ensuring that inventory is managed effectively and that customers can find what they are looking for when they come into the store.

For more information on affordable, easy-to-use technology developed specifically for the point of sale in small retail businesses, visit www.microsoft.com/pos.