

JOB PROFILE: SALES ASSISTANT

THE WORK

Sales assistants play a key role in making the customer's shopping experience enjoyable. They help customers in all kinds of retail outlets, including supermarkets, clothing retailers and department stores.

As a sales assistant you could:

- serve and advise customers
- handle payments by cash, card or cheque
- help customers to find the goods they want
- advise on the availability of stock and any special promotions
- give information on products and prices
- stack shelves or make sure goods are attractively displayed
- arrange customer orders and deliveries.

In specialist stores, for example mobile phone shops or electrical goods stores, you would be expected to have specialist knowledge of the product. You may also have additional related tasks such as promoting extra accessories and insurance.

In smaller independent shops, your duties would be more varied, and may include arranging window displays and receiving stock deliveries.

HOURS AND ENVIRONMENT

In a full-time job you would normally work between 35 and 40 hours a week, including weekends. Part-time work is

very common and you may work a shift pattern that includes evenings.

You would spend a lot of time on your feet and may need to lift and carry items of stock. You would often be expected to wear a uniform.

SKILLS AND INTERESTS

You should:

- be able to work as part of a team
- enjoy working with the public
- have a polite, helpful manner
- be confident when dealing with difficult situations
- have basic mathematical skills, for dealing with payments and stock checks
- be comfortable using computerised equipment such as tills
- have plenty of stamina
- be flexible and adaptable
- be reliable and trustworthy.

ENTRY

You often do not need specific qualifications to become a sales assistant, as employers are usually more interested in your 'people skills' and positive attitude than academic qualifications. However, employers will expect you to have a good standard of literacy and numeracy, and you may find it helpful to have GCSEs including English and maths, or qualifications of a similar level.

You will be at an advantage when applying for retail jobs if you have experience of working with the public and of handling cash.

You may be able to get into the retail industry through an Apprenticeship scheme. The range of Apprenticeships

available in your area will depend on the local jobs market and the types of skills employers need from their workers. To find out more about Apprenticeships, visit www.apprenticeships.org.uk.

TRAINING

Most of your training would be on the job. Larger retailers often have structured in-house training schemes for their staff at all levels.

Your training may be linked to work-based qualifications, such as:

- BTEC First Certificate/Diploma in Retail
- NVQ levels 1 and 2 in Retail Skills
- NVQ Level 3 in Retail
- NVQ levels 2 and 3 in Sales
- NVQ levels 2 and 3 in Customer Service.

You will also receive specialist food hygiene training if you work with fresh produce such as fish or meats.

OPPORTUNITIES

The retail sector employs around three million people, or 11% of the UK's workforce. Jobs may be advertised in the local press, Jobcentre Plus, on employers' own websites and instore.

Promotion prospects can be very good, especially in larger companies committed to staff training. With experience, you could progress to supervisor level then into management, or into retail merchandising.

You may also find the following links useful for job vacancies and further reading:

<http://www.inretail.co.uk>
<http://www.jobsinretail.co.uk>
<http://www.retailcareers.co.uk>
<http://www.retailmoves.com>
<http://www.retail-week.com>

We do not accept responsibility for the content of external sites.

ANNUAL INCOME

- Full-time salaries are usually between £11,000 and £15,000 a year.
- Supervisors can earn between £15,000 and £20,000 a year.

Many larger retail companies also offer benefits like staff discount and bonus schemes.

Figures are intended as a guideline only.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Skillsmart Retail

Fourth Floor
93 Newman Street
London
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Tel: 0800 093 5001
<http://www.skillsmartretail.com>