

11.17: Retailers that Distribute Products

Learning Objectives

- Describe the different types of retailers businesses use to distribute products



Retailing involves all activities required to market consumer goods and services to ultimate consumers who are purchasing for individual or family needs.

By definition, B2B purchases are not included in the retail channel since they are not made for individual or family needs. In practice this can be confusing because many retail outlets do serve both consumers and business customers—like Home Depot, which has a Pro Xtra program for selling directly to builders and contractors. Generally, retailers that have a significant B2B or wholesale business report those numbers separately in their financial statements, acknowledging that they are separate lines of business within the same company. Those with a pure retail emphasis do not seek to exclude business purchasers. They simply focus their offering to appeal to individual consumers, knowing that some businesses may also choose to purchase from them.

We typically think of a store when we think of a retail sale, even though retail sales occur in other places and settings. For instance, they can be made by a Pampered Chef salesperson in someone's home. Retail sales also happen online, through catalogs, by automatic vending machines, and in hotels and restaurants. Nonetheless, despite tremendous growth in both nontraditional retail outlets and online sales, a large portion of retail sales still take place in brick-and-mortar stores.

Beyond the distinction in the products they provide, there are structural differences among retailers that influence their strategies and results. One of the reasons the retail industry is so large and powerful is its diversity. For example, stores vary in size, in the kinds of services that are provided, in the assortment of merchandise they carry, and in their ownership and management structures.

Department Stores

Department stores are characterized by their very wide product mixes. That is, they carry many different types of merchandise, which may include hardware, clothing, and appliances. Each type of merchandise is typically displayed in a different section or department within the store. The depth of the product mix depends on the store, but department stores' primary distinction is the ability to provide a wide range of products within a single store. For example, people shopping at Macy's can buy clothing for a woman, a man, and children, as well as housewares such as dishes and luggage.

Chain Stores

The 1920s saw the evolution of the chain store movement. Because chain store businesses were so large, they were able to buy a wide variety of merchandise at discounted prices. The discounts substantially lowered their cost compared to costs of single-unit retailers. As a result, they could set retail prices that were lower than those of their small competitors and thereby increase their share of the market. Furthermore, chains were able to attract many customers because of their convenient locations, made possible by their financial resources and expertise in selecting locations.

Supermarkets



Supermarkets evolved in the 1920s and 1930s. For example, Piggly Wiggly Food Stores, founded by Clarence Saunders around 1920, introduced self-service and customer checkout counters. Supermarkets are large, self-service stores with central checkout facilities. They carry an extensive line of food items and often nonfood products. There are 37,459 supermarkets operating in the United States, and the average store now carries nearly 44,000 products in roughly 46,500 square feet of space. The average customer visits a store just under twice a week, spending just over \$30 per trip. Supermarkets' entire approach to the distribution of food and household cleaning and maintenance products is to offer large assortments these goods at each store at a minimal price.

Discount Retailers

Discount retailers, like Ross Dress for Less and Grocery Outlet, are characterized by a focus on price as their main sales appeal. Merchandise assortments are generally broad and include both hard and soft goods, but assortments are typically limited to the most popular items, colors, and sizes. Traditional stores are usually large, self-service operations with long hours, free parking, and relatively simple fixtures. Online retailers such as Overstock.com have aggregated products and offered them at deep discounts. Generally, customers sacrifice having a stable assortment of products to receive deep discounts on the available products.

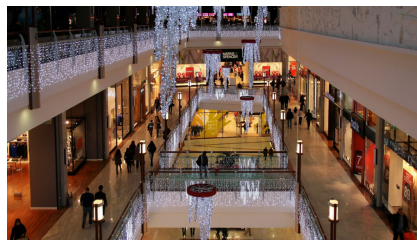
Warehouse Retailers

Warehouse retailers provide a bare-bones shopping experience at very low prices. Costco is the dominant warehouse retailer, with \$129 billion in sales in 2017. Warehouse retailers streamline all operational aspects of their business and pass on the efficiency savings to customers. Costco generally uses a cost-plus pricing structure and provides goods in wholesale quantities.

Franchises

The franchise approach brings together national chains and local ownership. An owner purchases a franchise which gives her the right to use the firm's business model and brand for a set period of time. Often, the franchise agreement includes well-defined guidance for the owner including training and on-going support. The owner, or franchisee, builds and manages the local business. *Entrepreneur* magazine posts a list each year of the 500 top franchises according to an evaluation of financial strength and stability, growth rate, and size. View the [Entrepreneur magazine 500 Top Franchises list](#). The 2016 list is led by Jimmy John's gourmet sandwiches, Hampton by Hilton midprice hotels, Supercuts hair salon, Servpro insurance/disaster restoration and cleaning, and Subway restaurants.

Malls and Shopping Centers



Malls and shopping centers are successful because they provide customers with a wide assortment of products across many stores. If you want to buy a suit or a dress, a mall provides many alternatives in one location. *Malls* are larger centers that typically have one or more department stores as major tenants or anchors. *Strip malls* are a common string of stores along major traffic routes, while isolated locations are freestanding sites not necessarily in heavy traffic areas. Stores in isolated locations must use promotion or some other aspect of their marketing mix to attract shoppers.

Online Retailing

Online retailing is unquestionably a dominant force in the retail industry, but today it accounts for only a small percentage of total retail sales. Companies like Amazon and Overstock.com complete all or most of their sales online. Many other online sales result from online sales from traditional retailers, such as purchases made at Nordstrom.com. Online marketing plays a significant role in preparing the buyers who shop in stores. In a similar integrated approach, catalogs that are mailed to customers' homes drive online orders. In a survey on its Web site, Land's End found that 75 percent of customers who were making purchases had reviewed the catalog first.^[1]

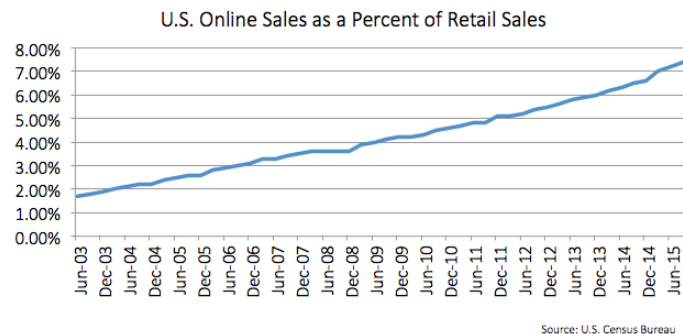


Figure 11.17.1: US online sales as a percent of retail sales

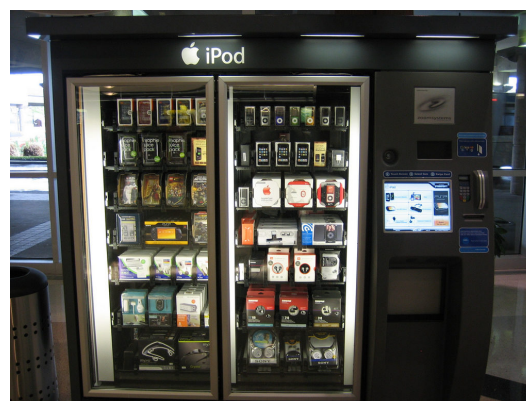
Catalog Retailing

Catalogs have long been used as a marketing device to drive phone and in-store sales. As online retailing began to grow, it had a significant impact on catalog sales. Many retailers who depended on catalog sales—Sears, Land's End, and J.C. Penney, to name a few—suffered as online retailers and online sales from traditional retailers pulled convenience shoppers away from catalog sales. Catalog mailings peaked in 2009 and saw a significant decrease through 2012. In 2013, there was a small increase in catalog mailings. Industry experts note that catalogs are changing, as is their role in the retail marketing process. Despite significant declines, U.S. households still receive 11.9 billion catalogs each year.^[2]

Nonstore Retailing

Beyond those mentioned in the categories above, there's a wide range of traditional and innovative retailing approaches. Although the Avon lady largely disappeared at the end of the last century, there are still in-home sales from Arbonne facial products, cabi women's clothing, WineShop at Home, and others. Many of these models are based on the idea of a woman using her personal network to sell products to her friends and their friends, often in a party setting.

Vending machines and point-of-sale kiosks have long been a popular retail device. Today they are becoming more targeted, such as companies selling easily forgotten items—such as small electronics devices and makeup items—to travelers in airports.



Each of these retailing approaches can be customized to meet the needs of the target buyer or combined to span a range of needs.

? Practice Question

<https://assessments.lumenlearning.co...essments/14504>

1. Ruiz, Rebecca R. "Catalogs, After Years of Decline, Are Revamped for Changing Times." The New York Times. January 26, 2015. Accessed June 25, 2019. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/26/business/media/catalogs-after-years-of-decline-are-revamped-for-changing-times.html>. ↵
2. Geller, Lois. "Why Are Printed Catalogs Still Around?" Forbes. October 16, 2012. Accessed June 25, 2019. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/loisgeller/2012/10/16/why-are-printed-catalogs-still-around/#75a143e17fcb>. ↵

Contributors and Attributions

CC licensed content, Original

- Revision and Adaptation. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** [CC BY: Attribution](#)
- Practice Question. **Authored by:** Robert Danielson. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** [CC BY: Attribution](#)

CC licensed content, Shared previously

- Chapter 10, Channel Concepts: Distributing the Product, from Introducing Marketing. **Authored by:** John Burnett. **Provided by:** Global Text. **Located at:** <http://solr.bccampus.ca:8001/bcc/file/ddbe3343-9796-4801-a0cb-7af7b02e3191/1/Core%20Concepts%20of%20Marketing.pdf>. **License:** [CC BY: Attribution](#)
- Bike & Skate. **Authored by:** Karol Franks. **Located at:** <https://www.flickr.com/photos/karolfranks/6586652573/>. **License:** [CC BY-NC-ND: Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives](#)
- Piggly Wiggly VA. **Authored by:** Acroterion. **Provided by:** Wikimedia Commons. **Located at:** https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Piggly_Wiggly_VA1.jpg. **License:** [CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike](#)
- Ankara: Panora Shopping Mall. **Authored by:** Jorge Franganillo. **Provided by:** flickr. **Located at:** <https://flic.kr/p/eDYfQW>. **License:** [CC BY: Attribution](#)
- iPod vending machine. **Authored by:** Greg Hewgill. **Provided by:** flickr. **Located at:** <https://flic.kr/p/68Mbr5>. **License:** [CC BY: Attribution](#)

11.17: Retailers that Distribute Products is shared under a [not declared](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **29.17: Retailers that Distribute Products** has no license indicated.