### Snapshot

Career Cluster(s): Human Services; Marketing

Interests: Selling Products; Automobiles Earnings (Yearly Average): \$29,180

Employment & Outlook: Little or No Change Expected

#### **OVERVIEW**

#### **Sphere of Work**

Retail sales workers help customers find products they want and process customers' payments. There are two types of retail sales workers: retail salespersons, who sell retail merchandise, such as clothing, furniture, and automobiles; and parts salespersons, who sell spare and replacement parts and equipment, especially car parts.

#### **Work Environment**

Retail sales workers usually work indoors, although some positions may require outdoor work as well.

#### **Occupation Interest**

Retail sales workers must be friendly, courteous, and knowledgeable about the products they sell. They enjoy interacting with customers and helping them find what they need. They may also have a vested interest in the products they sell, such a car enthusiast becoming a car salesman.



Photo via iStock/Prostock-Studio. [Used under license.]

# A Day in the Life—Duties and Responsibilities

Retail salespersons work in stores where they sell goods, such as books, cars, clothing, cosmetics, electronics, furniture, lumber, music, musical instruments, plants, shoes, and many other types of merchandise.

In addition to helping customers find and select items to buy, many retail salesper-

select items to buy, many retail salespersons process the payment for the sale, which typically involves operating cash

Depending upon the hours they work, retail salespersons may have to open or close cash registers. This includes counting the money in the register and separating charge slips, coupons, and exchange vouchers. They may also make deposits at a cash office.

registers. After taking payment for the purchases, retail salespersons may bag or

In addition, retail salespersons may help stock shelves or racks, arrange for mailing or delivery of purchases, mark price tags, take inventory, and prepare displays.

For some retail sales jobs, particularly those involving expensive and complex items, retail sales workers need special knowledge or skills. For example, those who sell cars must be able to explain the features of various models, manufactur-

### **Duties and Responsibilities**

Greeting customers and offering them assistance

package the purchases.

- Recommending merchandise based on customers' wants and needs
- Explaining the use and benefit of merchandise to customers
- Answering customers' questions
- Showing how merchandise works, if applicable
- Adding customers' total purchases and accepting payment
- Informing customers about current sales, promotions, and policies about payments and exchanges

### **Profile**

Working Conditions: Both Inside and Outside Physical Strength: Medium Work; Heavy Work Education Needs: Not Required; High School

Diploma

**Opportunities for Experience:** On-the-Job

Training

Interest Score: EC

ers' specifications, different types of options on the car, financing available, and the details of associated warranties.

In addition, retail sales workers must recognize security risks and thefts and understand their organization's procedures for handling thefts, which may include notifying security guards or calling police.

Parts salespersons sell spare and replacement parts and equipment, especially car parts. Most work in either automotive parts stores or automobile dealerships.

They take customers' orders, inform customers of part availability and price, and take inventory.

#### **WORK ENVIRONMENT**

#### **Immediate Physical Environment**

Most retail sales work is performed in clean, well-lit stores. Retail sales workers spend most of their time interacting with customers, answering questions, and assisting them with purchases.

Workers often stand for long periods and may need permission from a supervisor to leave the sales floor. If they sell items such as cars, plants, or lumberyard materials, they may work outdoors. Workers who sell musical instruments may be around loud music daily, as customers test equipment.

Many sales workers work evenings and weekends, particularly during holidays and other peak sales periods. Because the end-of-year holiday season is often the busiest time for retail stores, many employers limit retail sales workers' use of vacation time between November and the beginning of January.

Some retail salespersons work part time.

#### **Human Environment**

Retail sales workers interact with customers as a regular part of their job, and, therefore, must always be pleasant and courteous. They must also be prepared to deal with unruly customers and stay calm under pressure. Depending on the size of the store, they must also be able to work effectively with coworkers and be respectful of superiors.

#### **Technological Environment**

Technological conditions in retail vary widely, depending on what the store in question sells. At the very least, retail workers must be familiar with their store's inventory and checkout systems. Workers may also be required to possess knowledge of the items being sold, particularly in specialized settings such as automotive or sporting goods.

#### **EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

#### **High School/Secondary**

Retail sales work is an excellent entry-level job for high school students, so those with an interest should pursue employment opportunities after school or during the summer. These jobs help build important life and workplace skills and can be used on future résumés. Students should also seek employment in a retail sector that interests them, such as sports or music. Courses such as English and math will be important for these positions.

#### **Suggested High School Subjects**

- Accounting
- Algebra
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Civics
- Earth or Life or Physical Science
- Economics
- English
- Geometry
- History
- · Personal Finance
- Physics
- Psychology
- Sociology
- Statistics

#### Related Career Pathways/Majors

Arts, A/V Technology & Communications Career Cluster

• A/V Technology & Film Career Pathway

Human Services Career Cluster

Consumer Services Pathway

Marketing Career Cluster

Professional Sales Pathway

### Transferable Skills and Abilities

#### **Customer-service Skills**

- Being responsive to the wants and needs of customers
- Explaining the product options available to customers and making appropriate recommendations

#### **Interpersonal Skills**

 Possessing a friendly and outgoing personality in order to handle almost constant interaction with people

#### Math Skills

Calculating price totals, discounts, and change owed to customers

#### **Persistence**

 Starting each new sales attempt with a positive attitude, as a large number of attempted sales may not be successful

#### **Selling Skills**

- Interacting persuasively with customers
- Explaining clearly and effectively the benefits of the merchandise

## **Fast Fact**

In the days before traditional car dealerships, vehicles were sold by automakers to customers directly, or through channels that included mail order, department stores, and traveling salesmen. The Sears Model L (1908-1913) was manufactured by Lincoln Motors and sold through the Sears-Roebuck catalogue.



Source: searsmotorbuggy.com

#### **Postsecondary**

Although retail or parts sales positions usually have no formal education requirements, some employers prefer applicants who have a high school diploma or equivalent, especially employers who sell technical products or "big-ticket" items, such as electronics or cars.

#### **Related College Majors**

- Business & Finance
- Communications
- Economics
- General Sales, Distribution, & Marketing Operations
- Merchandising & Buying Operations
- Professional Sales
- Public Relations
- Retailing & Retail Operations

#### Adult Job Seekers

Adults should be able to find work in retail positions relatively easily, given the minimal educational requirements. Previous sales experience is an asset, as is knowledge of the retail segment in which they are seeking employment.

#### **Additional Requirements**

Most retail sales workers receive on-the-job training, which usually lasts a few days to a few months. In small stores, an experienced employee often trains newly hired workers. In large stores, training programs are more formal and usually conducted over several days.

# **Fast Fact**

The electric vehicle company Tesla Motors rejected the dealership sales model and

did away with traditional car salespeople. Inspired by Apple Store, Tesla opened showcase centers where prospective customers could view cars that were only available for order online. Tesla's model was the first of its kind, and gave them unique advantages as a new car company.



noto courtesy of Tesla, via Wikimedia Commons.

Source: www.investopedia.com

During training sessions, topics often include customer service, security, the store's policies and procedures, and how to operate the cash register.

Depending on the type of product they are selling, employees may be given additional specialized training. For example, salespersons working in cosmetics get instruction on the types of products the store offers and for whom the cosmetics would be most beneficial. Likewise, those who sell auto parts may be instructed on the technical functions of various parts, in addition to sales technique.

Because providing exceptional service to customers is a priority for many employers, employees often get periodic training to update and refine their skills.

#### **EARNINGS AND ADVANCEMENT**

Earnings of retail sales workers depend on place of employment, experience, and whether they earn commission on sales. The median hourly wage of retail salespersons was \$14.00 in 2021. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$10.50, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$21.85. The median hourly wage of parts salespersons was \$16.47 in 2020. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$11.03, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$27.97.

Retail sales workers may receive paid vacations, holidays, and sick days; life and health insurance; and retirement benefits. These are usually paid by the employer.

Retail sales workers typically have opportunities to advance to supervisory or managerial positions. Some employers want candidates for managerial positions to have a college degree.

Compensation systems vary by type of establishment and merchandise sold. Retail sales workers get hourly wages, commissions, or a combination of the two. Under a commission system, they get a percentage of the sales they make. This system offers sales workers the opportunity to increase their earnings considerably, but they may find that their earnings depend strongly on their ability to sell their product and on the ups and downs of the economy. Commissions are most common for retail sales workers selling "big-ticket" items, such as cars or electronics.

#### **EMPLOYMENT AND OUTLOOK**

Retail sales workers held 4,092,900 jobs in 2020. Employment is expected to show little or no change from 2020 to 2030.

Despite limited employment growth, about 557,200 openings for retail sales workers are projected each year, on average, over the decade. Most of those openings are expected to result from the need to replace workers who transfer to different occupations or exit the labor force, such as to retire.

Competition from online sales will lead to employment declines in brick-and-mortar retail stores. The increase in online sales is expected to continue over the next decade, limiting growth in the number of physical retail stores and reducing demand for retail sales workers. Online sales also are projected to affect specific segments of the retail industry to varying extents. For example, book and media stores are likely to see the most severe declines due to online competition. However, other retail segments, such as automobile dealers, have experienced much less of an impact.

Although online sales are expected to continue to increase, brick-and-mortar retail stores are also expected to increase their emphasis on customer service as a way to compete with online sellers. In addition, cost pressure may drive retailers to ask their in-store staff to do more. This means they may want workers who can perform a broad range of job duties that include helping customers find items, operating a cash register, and restocking shelves. Because retail sales workers provide this versatile range of services, they will still be needed in retail stores. In general, although consumers are increasing their online retail shopping, they

will continue to do most of their retail shopping in stores. Retail salespersons will be needed in stores to help customers and to complete sales.

People are keeping their cars longer and are buying new cars less often. The need for older cars to be serviced more frequently creates, in turn, more demand for car parts and parts salespersons. Moreover, the growth in demand for ride-hailing services has shifted some public transportation use back to automobiles services, further adding to the need for car parts in upkeep and maintenance. However, employment growth is expected to be slowed by competition from online parts retailers.

#### **Related Occupations**

- Cashier
- Customer Service Representative
- Food/Beverage Serving/Related Worker
- Information Clerk
- Insurance Sales Agent
- Real Estate Broker/Sales Agent
- Sales Engineer
- · Sales Manager
- Securities/Commodities/Financial Services Sales Agent
- Wholesale/Manufacturing Sales Representative

#### MORE INFORMATION

#### American Collegiate Retailing Association (ACRA)

1234 Street Avenue North New York, NY 97789 acraretail.org

#### **Council of State Retail Associations (CSRA)**

664 Sandpiper Bay Drive SW Sunset Beach, NC 28468 215.499.6284 info@councilsra.com www.councilsra.com

#### National Automobile Dealers Association (NADA)

8484 Westpark Drive, Suite 500 Tysons, VA 22102 800.557.6232 www.nada.org

#### **National Retail Federation (NRF)**

1101 New York Avenue NW, Suite 1200 Washington, DC 20005 202.783.7971 contact@nrf.com

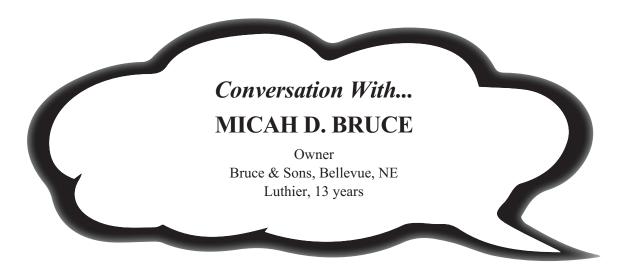
#### **Retail Industry Leaders Association (RILA)**

99 M Street SE, Suite 700 Washington, DC 20003 202.869.0200 www.rila.org

#### **Shop! Association**

111 West Jackson Boulevard, Suite 1412 Chicago, IL 60604 847.686.2239 shop@shopassociation.org shopassociation.org

Stuart Paterson



# What was your individual career path in terms of education/training, entry-level job, or other significant opportunity?

I was interested in building and in music when I was young.

I started playing guitar when I was II or I2. In seventh grade, I wrote a career report on luthiery, which is the craft of making and repairing stringed instruments. I remember thinking that would be fun, but probably not realistic because it sounded like there wasn't much money in it, and I didn't know anyone who did that.

As a kid I built tree forts and skateboard ramps. I built furniture in ninth grade woodshop, and in my senior year of high school I worked at a cabinet shop in a work-study program.

I always loved building things, working with my hands, seeing how things work. You get to see a direct cause and effect when working on something physical. I like the artistry of it, too, the creative element. Each piece of wood is unique. You can find joy in mundane, repetitive motion, too.

I started college at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln and studied construction management in my freshman year. It was not my favorite thing. The next semester I thought I would be a math major because it fit with building. But I left college because I wanted to build things. I started working at a music store repairing instruments. I was a good guitar player, knew how to use tools, and the store was willing to teach me from there. I was a pretty quick study.

I worked in trim and cabinetry work, and in guitar repair, before moving to Austin, Texas, and working for well-known custom guitar companies Bill Collings and John Allison, as a luthier and repair technician, and at Moniker Guitars as head of production.

I started Bruce & Sons 8 years ago as a part-time job while working for another company because I enjoyed it, and it supplemented my income. As I became more capable and developed a reputation, more work started coming my way, and I could raise prices. Since my wife and I moved back to Nebraska to raise our family four years ago, I've operated Bruce & Sons full-time. I feel my skills exceeded the pay scale that I would make working for someone else.

I have customers from all over. I make instruments for people in Utah, Texas, New York. I built a guitar for someone in the United Kingdom. But primarily my customers are from places where I've lived—Texas and Nebraska, or nearby, like Iowa and South Dakota. I also work with a dealer in Hawaii who sells ukuleles that I build. You can sell your work through a wholesaler or a shop on consignment. You can also build an instrument customized for a particular user. You can charge more for the custom-built, so you make more on that arrangement than working through a wholesaler, but there are fewer orders for custom-builds. I try to do a blend of everything, and it all evens out in the end. I've hired a part-time employee to help mainly with repairs, but he also does some building.

#### What are the most important skills and/or qualities for someone in your profession?

You need to have an understanding of physical objects, geometry, and structure, but also troubleshooting. I do a lot of instrument repair work in addition to building instruments. You need tool competency. You need hand skills—dexterity and coordination. You can learn concepts from a book or a classroom, but can your hands do it?

#### What do you wish you had known going into this profession?

A lot of learning is just doing something. I'll always be a lifelong learner. I wish I'd been more aware of that: to try more things and not be intimidated or afraid of failing. You can't be a perfectionist. I've built some instruments looking back that aren't my proudest work, but I learned a lot. There are no secrets. It's just hard work and practice over time. You accumulate knowledge, skills, tools and reputation, and the sales aspects of the business. It's really just taking time to grow.

#### Are there many job opportunities in your profession? In what specific areas?

I wouldn't say it's a hot market. There's repair work, which in large part you'll either work at a music store or on contract to a music store. For building instruments, there are a lot of guitar factories you could work for. But it's not a huge growth industry.

# How do you see your profession changing in the next 5 years? How will technology impact that change, and what skills will be required?

Selling instruments will continue to be more online, so you'll need better photos and video content. My customers in New York and the United Kingdom were found online through Instagram and my website. You never know who will come across your stuff and take interest!

For building instruments, I have computer-aided machinery, and that's getting more affordable every year, so it's lowering the bar for competition. That means I have to use it more advantageously, more efficiently than someone who has just bought it. For repairs, companies are always formulating new finishes, but it's not a landmark change. It's just a matter of keeping up with improvements.

In some ways we're doing the same thing we've been doing for centuries, maybe just with variations on the theme.

#### What do you enjoy most about your job? What do you enjoy least about your job?

I enjoy making a broken thing work again or restoring an old instrument. That's gratifying both in terms of the instrument itself and seeing a customer enjoy it. Building an instrument is a

whole other level. It's a work of art on its own but also will propagate art. That's a cool idea. Instruments are beautiful even when they are not being played but maybe partly because we intuit a potential.

What I like least is the business side? Usually, it's half a day a week for ordering parts and materials, answering e-mails, managing the financial side. I pay taxes monthly. Running a business that uses a lot of physical goods, there's a lot of upfront costs. I don't enjoy the business side; but as a sole entrepreneur, you have to wear different hats.

# Can you suggest a valuable "try this" for students considering a career in your profession?

The interest in playing an instrument or in music, in general, is an essential starting point. Try playing an instrument. Or try building something for curves and form because there is an ergonomic aspect. Take woodworking courses at school or at a shop.

This interview was originally published in 2021.