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EVOLVING JOB DYNAMICS IN THE RETAIL SECTOR

Remember the neighbourhood Sharma Kiryana Store that your mother sent you to with a list of monthly provisions or when guests visited unannounced? Now compare it to a neatly organised, air conditioned store like Reliance Mart or Spencer's, and it becomes evident that we are looking at what I would call 'glamorised retail'. Of late, organised retail has taken a new form and meaning where on one hand, the customers are demanding the best in terms of products and services, and on the other, companies are gearing up to give them the best. This reflects a change in the focus of retail strategy of the corporates, where retail is no longer a task done by unskilled daily wagers but has instead become a plum white-collar job competing for the best set of skills available in the graduate market. This change, initiated by policy makers, international retailers' interest in the Indian market and the gearing up of domestic players, has changed the way retail industry has been perceived across the populace. Now, not only do parents want their children to get employment with big retail chains, like Big Bazar, Shopper's Stop and Next, but even the management graduates vie for placements in these establishments as the challenges and responsibilities involved in the various departments, like supply

chain, logistics handling, inventory management and merchandising, gives immense job satisfaction.

But, while Indian retail has taken the corporate form, it is not easy to woo the up-to-date informed customers to the store. Today, the urban nuclear family may not necessarily visit a retail destination for their household requirements but to fulfill their five-year-old son's demand to visit the play station of the mall. A trip to the mall may even be a way to meet the family's need to spend

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time together in ambient conditions. Whether it is the deal-interested husband or sale-interested wife, bringing them to your shop involves creating promotional events where they can be socially engaged through games, contests and other offers. To achieve these outcomes, retail business strategy calls for 'focus', or else the neighborhood competitor will take the customers away.

Researchers across developed and developing nations, including India, agree that the hedonic trend has caught up and retail

shoppers now visit retail stores fifty per cent or more times for reasons other than functional or utilitarian, or are need driven. This is the reason that retailers today cannot have the 'one size fits all' strategy; rather they need to understand the requirements and expectations based on the age group, gender, income and education profiles of the customers and build their stores around this understanding. This knowledge helps them in deciding whether they want to be a full-time family store for the price sensitive middle income group customer or an upscale speciality store for the brand conscious buyer. In India, such a focused approach is essentially required for luxury brands since identification of the customer segment has a bearing on the crucial decision of the store's location, an aspect that involves capital and infrastructure issues and costs that are of fixed nature affecting the profitability of the store.

Given the situation, the role and responsibilities of the various jobs in the retail sector have changed and the requirement is now for a specialised set of skills that comes with a promise of commensurate rewards.

The challenge is to match the skills to the changing requirement of the customer, who visits retail stores more for other purposes than just buying, at least to the extent that he notices the brand/store and is motivated enough to visit the store. Consequently, marketing efforts must be directed at him to encourage him to make a purchase and leave with a feeling of satisfaction. Indian retail today is a big draw and brands need to differentiate themselves from the others in order to be noticed and rake in success. ■