

Healthy retail

Hints and tips for healthy customer service

**Retail
Order:**

1453



healthyretail.org

Sales receipt

Welcome more customers.....	££££s
Small change makes a big difference.....	££££s
Map the customer journey.....	££££s
Keep customers loyal.....	££££s
Increase net profit.....	££££s
Doing the right thing.....	££££s
More than just a shop.....	££££s
Total savings: ££££££s	



UNIVERSITY of
STIRLING



UKRI Healthy Ageing Challenge



Delivered by
Innovate UK
and ESRC

Thank you for your custom



ILC retail guides

This guidance on **Healthy retail: hints and tips for healthy customer service** should take approximately **6** minutes to read. It gives you the basics on why great customer service is important, and how everyone can benefit: customers, workers and retailers.

We've created these guides to help retailers understand how they can respond to an ageing population, and why being inclusive makes commercial sense. Welcoming a wider range of customers and workers opens up new opportunities for businesses.

Everyone's entitled to a healthy, happy and long life - but the ageing process affects us all differently. Retailers have a key role to play in enabling customers and staff to live healthier, more active later lives. Making shopping environments more welcoming and inclusive supports independence, helps us stay fit, and ensures that people who have a health condition, disability or caring responsibility can maintain access to the products and services they want.

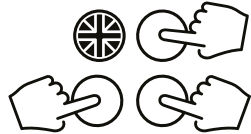
This guide explores how you can adapt customer service to become more inclusive for customers that include older people, those with buggies and small children, and those with limited mobility or impaired vision. This can help you avoid common customer complaints and gain a valuable advantage in the current economic landscape. It shares ideas, real-life examples, and sources of further information.

ILC has created these guides to help transform the way the retail sector sees and serves older people. We believe that encouraging inclusive shopping spaces is better for everyone, **no matter our age or ability**.

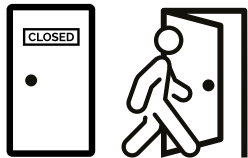
The facts

Customers go elsewhere

75% of disabled people have decided against using a UK business because of poor service or accessibility



Thank you for your custom



96% of dissatisfied customers don't complain – they just switch to a competitor

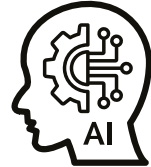


86% of customers have switched due to bad customer service

Retail Order: 1237 | 

Digital isn't for everyone

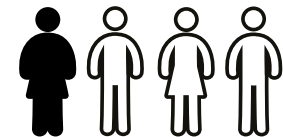
BT plans to cut up to **11,000 of their customer service** staff by 2030



People with dementia **spend less** due to lack of in-person support and increasing automation

Retail Order: 1237 | 

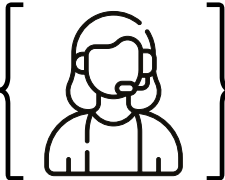
HMRC has cut customer service staff by 25% since 2018



Does it add up?



UK businesses lose £11.4bn every month in lost productivity dealing with customer problems



Employees spend **4.8 days a month on average** dealing with customer problems



In 2022, **over a quarter of shops in London's Oxford Street** were standing empty

Retail Order: 1237 | 

Why does this matter?

While some customers welcome the shift to automated systems, not all do – and this dissatisfaction increases pressure on remaining staff. An incredible 95% of call centre staff report work-related problems with their mental wellbeing, taking an average of 2.78 sick days each to deal with them. It's estimated that businesses are losing an average of nine working days per year to lost productivity.

Retail is under pressure

Brexit has reduced workforce numbers all along the supply chain, from manufacturing to delivery. Customer frustration with lack of stock gives customer service departments more work – and for many retailers those teams haven't fully recovered from the effects of the pandemic.

Meanwhile, complaints remain a major issue. UK firms spend working hours worth **£9.24 billion** every month handling complaints.



Get ahead of the issues

In its 2023 report, the Institute of Customer Service recommends preventing problems in the first place and improving complaint handling. Improving your services, developing and sourcing reliable products and winning new business is the best way to use your time and resources. It found that customers' top three priorities are: "making it easier to contact the right person to help", "developing friendly, helpful and knowledgeable staff", and "better website navigation".

In its research with older customers, Age UK found that many believe heeding complaints is vital for improving services – similarly, they give praise where its due. Mistakes and problems will always happen, but if you're transparent and clear about how to put things right, customers see that you're serious about keeping their business and valuing their custom.

"I believe in complaining and I also believe in thanking people."

Participant in Age UK survey, Derby 2017

Embracing older customers can pay off

Older customers appreciate great customer service, even if goods are more expensive.

They have significant consumer power - and this is increasing. Customers aged 50 to 64 spend more on cars than any other age group. Beauty brands increasingly market their products to this age group – that's a market estimated to be worth \$27.29 billion by 2026.

Great customer service can win over new customers and keep long-standing ones loyal. And bad service drives customers away, with negative experiences spreading quickly by word of mouth or on social media.

"You feel invisible. At the perfume counter, the staff ignore me because I'm an older woman with a stick. But if I'm with my daughter, they're there in a flash. I have the money. I want to buy mascara and make up...but the staff...don't think someone like me wants to wear mascara."

Participant in Age UK survey, Derby 2017

What can you do?



Find out what your customers want

Great customer service is inclusive and accessible. It's not easy to work out for yourself what features make more shops inclusive. But you don't have to: many charities and advocacy groups offer guidance on the barriers their customer groups face. We've put together a brief list to help you get started:

[The Equality and Human Rights Commission has guidance to help retailers support disabled customers](#)

[The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has videos on good practice when serving disabled customers](#)

[This Age UK article includes tips on creating an age-friendly business](#)

[The Centre for Ageing Better has a guide to becoming an age-friendly employer](#)

[The Alzheimer's Society has a guide to dementia-friendly retail](#)

[The British Dyslexia Association has a style guide for creating dyslexia-inclusive communications](#)

The Business Disability forum has essential [guidance and resources](#) as well as [quick tips](#) and a full [toolkit for SMEs](#)



Consider customer experience

Consultancy Stephen Spencer + Associates have created a [guide to help you understand and improve your customer experience](#). Originally designed for museums and attractions, it adapts ideas from that sector to help you motivate staff and understand how great customer service and experiences can make customers into advocates.

Best practice

Jumbo is the largest supermarket chain in the Netherlands, with over 700 stores. In 2019, it piloted **Kletskassa or chat checkouts** in 200 stores. The chat checkouts are slow lanes for customers who would like to chat with their cashier rather than hurry. The stores also feature a coffee corner for a stop off and some conversation. This initiative was part the Dutch government's action programme *Een tegen eenzaamhei* (Together Against Loneliness).

[Guidance from the Association of Convenience Stores \(ACS\)](#) offers some great low-cost ways to welcome disabled customers, including helpful tips on communication. Using language carefully can be key to making customers feel welcome and comfortable.

"The waitress is so kind – I think she picked up on the fact that I'm blind ... every single time she comes and puts anything down on the table [she says] 'I'm putting cutlery down on the left, the water's sitting on your right,' she's telling me exactly where she's putting everything, which I just really appreciate – and that never happens!"

Molly Burke, speaker, creator and advocate, describing eating at a restaurant in Hollywood Burbank airport with her guide dog, Gallop

The ACS is working with the Alzheimer's Society to create 25,000 dementia-friendly shops in the convenience sector – known as Dementia Friends. Their aim is to help you understand and support people with dementia. You can [sign up for their free training manual here](#) – it's for you and your staff.

Best practice

[G Live arts centre](#)'s cinema in Guildford run monthly "memory cinema" sessions. These are informal, dementia-friendly screenings of classic films for just £4 a ticket. Staff present screenings in a friendly and accessible way, and are on hand to help. Cinemagoers are invited to arrive early for lunch beforehand, and can take food and drinks into the screenings. Afterwards there is a themed chat or workshop, turning this staff-led screening into a regular community event. Advertising is friendly and inclusive.



Best practice

[Morrisons supermarket](#) has a "quieter hour" every Saturday morning, for anyone who needs a less busy shopping environment. Stores turn music and radios off, avoid tannoy announcements, reduce the movement of trolleys and baskets, and turn checkout sounds and other electrical noises down.





Understand your importance

Whether you're in a rural village or the heart of a city, you can play a key role in your community. Good retailers provide more than just a shopping experience, embracing a wider role in building community – and besides doing good, this drives loyalty and improves business.

Best practice

In 2022, Marks and Spencer employee and bowel cancer patient Cara Hoofe pitched her idea of printing bowel cancer symptoms on M&S toilet roll packaging, via an employee suggestion scheme. M&S took up the idea with Bowel Cancer UK, who created the [#getonaroll campaign](#). To date, more than 10 major supermarket brands and manufacturers have helpful preventative health information on all their loo rolls.



Best practice

High blood pressure is a risk factor for heart disease. In the [Los Angeles Barbershop Blood Pressure Study](#), which took place between 2015 and 2017, 52 black-owned barbershops for men monitored their customers' blood pressure. Making services easily available to men where they're comfortable may improve access to care, screenings, and education, while helping control chronic conditions.

In the intervention group, pharmacists gave customer with high readings health information and prescriptions to lower their systolic blood pressure. In the control group, customers were advised to get follow-up care. 68% of customers in the intervention group reduced their blood pressure to healthy levels. This scheme has been so successful that local teams are running this scheme in the UK, in barbershops, mosques, supermarkets and domino clubs.

A study by e-commerce platform Shopify found that 58% of customers say that experiencing excellent service in the past will influence their decision to buy in the future. Shopify also offers [great examples of low-cost customer service improvements for smaller retailers](#). These include returns policies such as free postage, proactively tracking customers orders to ensure their arrival, and employing a consistent customer service experience across all channels, including social media, live chat, email, telephone – and most importantly, in-store.

These guides were written by Ailsa Forbes, Retail Impact Fellow at the ILC.

The Retail Impact project is supported by the [University of Stirling](#) and [UK Research and Innovation \(UKRI\)](#) as part of the UK Government's Healthy Ageing Challenge.

We've put all the information about this ILC project online. You'll find more details about the information in this guide, along with further advice and the references for all our facts and stats.

It's all at: healthyretail.org

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About the ILC

The International Longevity Centre UK (ILC) is the UK's specialist think tank on the impact of longevity on society. The ILC was established in 1997, as one of the founder members of the International Longevity Centre Global Alliance, an international network on longevity.

We have unrivalled expertise in demographic change, ageing and longevity. We use this expertise to highlight the impact of ageing on society, working with experts, policy makers and practitioners to provoke conversations and pioneer solutions for a society where everyone can thrive, regardless of age.



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