

RETAIL/MERCHANDISING

What can I do with this major?

AREAS

BUYING/PURCHASING

Product development
Planning and allocation
Global sourcing

EMPLOYERS

Discount stores
Department stores
Mass merchants
Specialty stores: (e.g., grocery, clothing, electronics, health and personal care, sporting goods, building materials and garden supply, furniture and home furnishings, etc.).
Online retailers

STRATEGIES

Obtain sales and retail experience through part-time jobs and internships.
Supplement curriculum with business courses as some employers prefer it and others require it.
Develop organizational skills and attention to detail to monitor inventory and compare products, prices, and markets. Forecasting skills are expected as buyers select merchandise that may sell six months later.
Acquire analytical and mathematical skills to operate within a budget and to evaluate sales data including competitors'.
Build excellent interpersonal and communication skills for negotiating with vendors. Prepare to work under pressure and exhibit good judgment and decisiveness.
Be prepared to travel frequently in order to visit fashion and trade shows and industry conferences to search for new merchandise. Overtime is generally required.
Expect to work with overseas suppliers. Knowledge of languages, customs, and cultures will be helpful.
Exhibit a competitive drive with the understanding that a buyer's goal is to beat the sales and profit records of the previous year.
Be prepared to begin as a buyer trainee. Training periods can range from 1 to 5 years.

AREAS

EMPLOYERS

STRATEGIES

MANAGEMENT/ADMINISTRATION

Corporate
Regional
Store
Store assistant
Store department

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Online retailers

Seek retail experience through internships or part-time jobs.
Get involved in student organizations and pursue leadership roles.
Be prepared to start in entry-level management trainee positions.
Learn to work well on a team and to motivate and direct others. Managers may be expected to train, evaluate, and coach junior team members.
Develop quick decision-making, problem solving, and communication skills to assist customers, manage employees, monitor promotions and sales goals, and work with buyers.
Exhibit excellent organizational skills which are necessary to oversee the daily operations of a store or a department.
Plan to work long and irregular hours, including holidays, especially during peak sales times.

SALES

Retail
Industrial
Wholesale
Direct marketing
Consumer product
Financial services
Insurance
Real estate
Advertising
E-commerce
Customer service

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Online retailers
Call centers
Consumer product companies
Service organizations (estate planning, fundraising)
Non-profit organizations
Manufacturers
Financial companies
Insurance companies
Print and electronic media outlets

Obtain a part-time job or internship in sales to gain experience as these positions are often stepping stones to higher-level positions.
Demonstrate initiative, persistence, and competitive drive. Some positions require employees to reach sales quotas under pressure.
Learn to communicate effectively with a wide-range of people. Take additional courses in interpersonal, public, and persuasive communication.
Exhibit a commitment to customer satisfaction.
Seek knowledge of trends in loss prevention and the processes for handling security risks as you will likely receive training in these areas.
Prove extensive knowledge of merchandise for sale.
Expect to work evenings, weekends, and holidays during peak times.

AREAS

EMPLOYERS

STRATEGIES

HUMAN RESOURCES

Recruiting/staffing
Compensation
Benefits
Orientation/training
Safety/health
Employee relations
Employee services
Organizational development

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Online retailers

Supplement degree program with classes in psychology, sociology, and human resource development.
Gain relevant experience through internships.
Acquire strong verbal and written communication skills.
Learn to solve problems creatively and resolve conflicts.
Develop strong computer skills as many human resource systems are automated.
Join the Society of Human Resource Management and other related professional associations.
Seek endorsements such as the Professional Human Resource Certification (PHR).
Earn a master's degree in human resource management for career advancement.

VISUAL MERCHANDISING

Space planning

Discount stores
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Specialty stores (e.g., grocery, clothing, electronics, health and personal care, sporting goods, building materials and garden supply, furniture and home furnishings, etc.).

Demonstrate creativity and knowledge of design concepts (lighting, color, etc.) to highlight products and increase sales. Knowledge of fashion and sales trends is required.
Seek retail sales experience and plan to shadow or intern with a visual merchandiser.
Supplement degree with courses on buying behavior, consumer psychology, interior design, art, fashion design, and interior decorating.
Develop mechanical aptitude to set up displays, build props and adjust lighting. Expect to lift and carry merchandise, use ladders, and be comfortable with heights.
Plan to work flexible hours, including mornings, evenings, and weekends. Travel to multiple locations may be required.

AREAS

EMPLOYERS

STRATEGIES

INDEPENDENT SALES

Sales
Consulting

Self-employed
Companies that utilize independent consultants
(e.g., Mary Kay Cosmetics, Avon, Stella & Dot,
Thirty-One, Pampered Chef, etc.).

Exhibit entrepreneurial spirit, self-discipline, and perseverance, all of which are keys to success.
Develop an excellent knowledge of and belief in a particular product or service.
Supplement program with courses in accounting and advertising.
Obtain extensive sales and business experience by working for a company or retailer in a related product area before launching a small business.
Build relationships with potential investors and customers.

NON-STORE RETAILING

E-commerce
Direct marketing:
 Paper and electronic catalogs
 Door-to-door solicitation/sales

Online retailers
Home shopping networks
Advertising agencies
Magazine, newspaper, book publishing companies
Internet marketing companies

Develop strong technical and communication skills.
Supplement program with courses in marketing, advertising, or communications.
Obtain sales experience through a retail or telemarketing position.

GENERAL INFORMATION

- The retail industry is the nation's largest industry sector employer.
- Obtain retail experience through summer jobs, part-time jobs, or internships.
- Become familiar with software and technology related to sales, distribution, and inventory tracking such as JDA.
- Join student branches of professional retailing associations. Read their publications and attend their meetings to stay abreast of changing trends in the field, i.e. "shopper marketing."
- Maintain up-to-date knowledge of trends in retail through industry publications. Attend professional conferences.
- Be prepared to work holidays and weekends, typically the busiest times for retailers.
- Consider developing proficiency in second or third languages to increase marketability.
- Contact stores or markets of interest. Inquire about management training programs.
- Most retailers promote from within the organization; therefore, management trainee programs or sales associate positions are a good way to begin.
- Supplement program with courses in marketing, accounting, and communications.
- A degree in Retail/Merchandising may qualify one for career opportunities in areas of business outside of retail including marketing, finance, insurance, banking, management, etc. Determine an area of interest and build relevant skills and experiences.