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.com

# Top 100

2016

Consumers weigh in on the top brands including brick-n-mortar, online and overall customer experience.

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- Quickly identify key shopping trends
- Pinpoint key drivers for increasing share of wallet
- Improve targeted marketing
- Drive positive word-of-mouth

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# Top 100

2016

Retail **customer**  
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**Welcome to Retail Customer Experience's 2016 Top 100 report**, with insight on which retailers (online, brick-and-mortar and omnichannel players) are doing the job when it comes to providing a robust and rewarding customer experience.

In past years, we've approached our report in different ways. One year we provided a pure list of brands. Last year, we changed it up to focus on four categories, which included: Best Customer Service, Best Online Experience, Best Brick-And-Mortar Experience and Best Overall Customer Experience.

This year, we tweaked our poll questions and included inquiries regarding mobile retail activity by consumers. We also revamped the format to put a concise spotlight on the top 25 retailers garnering praise across the four categories.

Each of the top 25, presented in alphabetic fashion for fairness sake, scored high in at least one, and in most cases more than a few, of the four categories. Our coverage includes news of the retailer's latest customer experience strategies, compelling news of the past year, as well as some background that readers will find interesting.

The top winner, which took the No. 1 crown last year as well, likely comes as no surprise to anyone in the business: Amazon.com. Just over 60 percent of those polled in our survey listed CEO Jeff Bezos' company as providing the best online experience. The ecommerce powerhouse also scored tops in best customer experience (20.5 percent) and best overall customer experience (28.8 percent) – no other retailer even hit a double digit number in either category.

As mentioned above, our poll this year also included questions relating to mobile shopping and using mobile devices in a retail scenario from product research to product payment. We believe it was critical to query consumers given how fast mobile device use is becoming the norm in retail segment.

Just consider this: 56.8 percent of shoppers are using mobile devices to research and compare products, and 55.2 percent who use to make a purchase will click Amazon.com to make their purchases.

Finally, thank you for reading Retail Customer Experience, and for downloading this special report. Also a big thank you to ConfirmIT, whose sponsorship allowed us to provide this report to you at no charge.

**Judy Mottl**, Editor, RetailCustomerExperience.com



#### About the Sponsor

Confirmit enables retailers to develop and maintain Voice of the Customer, Voice of the Employee, and Market Research programs that deliver insight and business improvements. Confirmit's clients create multi-channel, multi-lingual feedback and research programs that engage customers, empower employees, deliver a compelling respondent experience, and provide high Return on Investment.

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# OVERALL WINNER

## #1 Amazon

Top  
100



**Greatest threat to traditional retailers.**

**Most disruptive player in decades.**

**Gigantic powerhouse. Brilliantly run.**

Those are just some of the latest descriptions of Amazon.com, which — at the ripe old age of 21 — once again took top honors in Retail Customer Experience's annual Top 100 Retailers guide.

The Seattle-based mega-retailer has had a simple mission from its start: to be Earth's most customer-centric company where people can find and discover anything they want to buy online.

It's fulfilling that mission, as consumers love Amazon and its customer service. In our Top 100 poll, Amazon grabbed 20.5 percent of the vote for best customer service, 28.8 percent for overall customer experience and a whopping 61.9 percent for best online experience. No other retailer came close, or even hit double digits, to compete with Amazon in those three categories.

One reason is simple: Amazon is not like any other retailer. Even a former Target chief acknowledges the e-commerce player's amazing impact on the retail sector.

"They imagine themselves from a different perspective than retailers do," said Dale Nitschke, managing

partner at Ovative Group and a former president of Target.com, in an article at Minnesota Public Radio. "They're a brilliantly run organization that has created so many more revenue streams than traditional retailers."

That is exactly why Amazon is the U.S. consumer's favorite place to buy online. It is brilliantly run, especially regarding its consumer experience and customer expectation aspect.

It has made shopping and finding product easier than anyone else has, it has streamlined checkout (the infamous "one-click" payment option was cutting-edge when introduced in 1997) and it makes returning products just as easy.

Amazon has taken its initial winning strategy it used to sell books into every other service it has launched. From the moment it disrupted the retail bookstore segment, it hasn't stopped disrupting and at the same time it has pioneered innovative e-commerce strategies.

One of its most successful strategies, which industry watchers describe as the engine propelling its success into non-retail business, is Amazon's \$99 Prime annual membership program. Prime celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2015.

Prime boasts 45 million subscribers who are very

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# OVERALL WINNER

willing to pay the annual fee in return for expedited free shipping and other perks such as streaming video and book loaning. One of its most recent ventures, its original TV/video series programming, already has been crowned with Golden Globe awards. Amazon's product SKU inventory features 20 million items, tens of thousands of movies and TV programs, more than 1 million songs and 800,000 books available through its Kindle e-reader lending library.

A statement on Amazon's "innovations" site may express the secret sauce of its success in the best fashion: "We're a company of builders. Of pioneers. It's our job to make bold bets, and we get our energy from inventing on behalf of customers."

The company is guided by four principles: customer obsession rather than competitor focus, passion for invention, commitment to operational excellence and long-term thinking.

Consider this fact: Amazon built Prime Now (its one-hour delivery service) in just 111 days.

Amazon loves inventing. It has a marketplace where users can sell and buy goods. It built the Echo (Alexa), which is fast becoming the home and office assistant for anyone wanting music, news, insight and organizational help. Consumers are embracing its AmazonFresh food service. Coming down the pike is its Prime Air drone service, promising product delivery in 30 minutes.

Amazon has even developed its own smartphone, although that device hasn't set the consumer segment on fire. Yet in late January 2016 there came news the e-tailer wasn't giving up on its smartphone quest. A report from The Information claims Amazon is striving to partner with smartphone makers to integrate its services into their devices.

For those who may not recall, Amazon was launched in founder Jeff Bezos' garage in 1995 purely as a book seller; within just 30 days, it fulfilled orders for customers in 50 states and 45 countries.

Today more than 2 million small businesses, retail brands and individual sellers use the Amazon.com e-commerce platform that was the launching point for Amazon's initial retail foray. In 2015 the innovation and invention culminated in robust sales: \$22.72 billion in the first quarter alone, and a sales spike of 15 percent compared to a year prior.

This past holiday season, Amazon once again lit up the retail space with some insane sales accomplishments: More than 23 million items ordered on Cyber Monday alone, a 40 percent spike from the year prior. The reason? It's a simple one: As Amazon's leaders noted in the Q4 2015 earnings call in late January, their heads are bent down, focused on boosting the consumer shopping and customer experience.

In 2015 Amazon launched Handmade at Amazon, a

new store featuring genuinely handmade items crafted and sold directly from artisans. The site features over 200,000 quality handcrafted items from around the world, and artisans continue to add thousands of items each day. There are 10,000 artisans, with hundreds of new artisans joining every week.

Amazon also debuted Amazon Home Services for on-demand professional services, backed by Amazon's Happiness Guarantee. Customers can browse,



purchase and schedule hundreds of professional services directly on Amazon. In addition, it launched Amazon Exclusives, providing customers direct access to innovative products from more than a hundred up-and-coming brands. Top brands and vertical retailers selling on Amazon include Bluefly, Jewelry.com and Pep Boys.

Phew. Imagine being not only the top e-commerce retailer but one to whom other top retail brands turn for increasing sales. That's the Amazon magic, and it's likely magic no other retailer will be replicating anytime soon.

As retail consultant Howard Davidowitz tells MPR, "There is nothing crazy about Amazon. And everyone is following and imitating them and trying to play in their ballpark and they can't."

# Top 100

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# Top 100

2016

Top 25 Brands



# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

## 7-Eleven

Top  
100

**Founded:** 1927

**Headquarters:** Dallas, Texas

**Workforce:** 20,000+

**Retail Locations:** 56,600 worldwide

**Quirky Tidbit:** 7 Eleven was the first retailer to offer fresh-brewed coffee in to-go cups in 1964.

### Survey Rankings:

Customer Service: **#23**

Online Experience: **#10**

Brick & Mortar Experience: **#26**

Overall Customer Experience: **#23**

The world's largest convenience store chain got its unique name from its hours of operation back in 1946 and operates stores in 18 countries. It all began with an ice company that expanded into a retail food goods store concept that now boasts 2,500 products and known for its iconic brands such as Big Gulp, Slurpee and of course its coffee.

The privately held company is a wholly owned subsidiary of Seven-Eleven Japan Co., Ltd.

In 2015 it received over 12 various accolades for its community service and support of American military veterans. It's been heralded at the best in convenience store channel, as a Top 20 franchise and most valuable global brands list. The company's official "birth date" is July 11 (7/11) and typically celebrates the annual highlight with a free offering to consumers.

The chain has achieved several firsts in the retail convenience space: first to open 24 hours, sell fresh coffee in to-go cups, and offer a self-serve soda fountain, as well as herbal enhancements to its coffee to go. It was also the first convenience store to sell pre-paid phone cards and offer ATM services to consumers in 1984.

7 Eleven guests drink 14 million Slurpees each month, with Coca-Cola and wild cherry as the two top flavors. Since introduced in 1966, some 7.2 billion Slurpees have been sold, enough for every person on the planet, according to the company.



In the past few years it's become a go-to place for affordable and good pizza, and sells about 20 million a year. Only Pizza Hut sells more whole pizzas at around the same number of U.S. locations.

7-Eleven is also known for offering fresh fruit and if the 75 million bananas sold in 2014 were put end-to-end the bananas would stretch from Dallas to New Delhi India, about 8,200 miles.

Nearly one-third of the more than 6 million people who stop by a U.S. 7 Eleven store each day purchase immediately consumable food, and 25 percent of the U.S. population lives within one mile of a 7 Eleven store. The chain sells 1.1 million cups of coffee each day

For those needing cash on the go, it's often the to-go place as 7 Eleven has the largest ATM network of any retailer in U.S.

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

## Ace Hardware

Top  
100

**Founded:** 1924, independent retailer owned cooperative

**Headquarters:** Oak Brook, Illinois

**Financials:** 3Q 2015 revenue \$1.3 billion, an increase of \$148.5 million (13.2 percent) from year prior.

**Workforce:** 80,000 store associates employed by Ace retailers; 900 team members employed at Ace Hardware's headquarters; 5,000 work at Ace's U.S. distribution and manufacturing facilities.

**Retail Locations:** 4,900 worldwide in approximately 60 countries

**Quirky Tidbit:** Founders chose name "Ace" in a nod to World War I fighter pilots.

### Survey Rankings:

Customer Service: **#3**

Online Experience: **#17**

Brick & Mortar Experience: **#3**

Overall Customer Experience: **#16**

The year 2015 was one of celebration and success for Ace Hardware given financial achievements and awards garnered for high customer experience innovation, consumer satisfaction, industry growth, and shopper adoration.

In fact, the third quarter of 2015 proved to be a record-setter for Ace Hardware as it reflected the best sales and profit in Ace's history. President and CEO John Venhuizen attributes the accomplishment to his company's "world class retailers, associates and corporate teammates."

The list of accolades includes: Highest in customer satisfaction among home improvement retail stores, nine years in a row, according to J.D. Power; No. 2 on Career Bliss' list of "happiest retailers to work for in 2015"; No. 24 on the National Retail Federation's STORES Magazine's Hot 100 List; No. 6 on the Franchise Times Top 200 List; named "America's Favorite Home Improvement Store" by a Market Force study.

"We like to say that 'helpful is our weapon in the world.' Few if any retailers on the planet wield that weapon with as much efficacy as our local Ace owners," said Venhuizen. "The most encouraging thing from this impressive list of accolades that our stores received, most of which were from their neighbors, is that it underscores for us that a servant heart is not the enemy of a successful business; but rather the enabler of it."

During 2015 Ace added 36 new domestic stores in the same quarter and cancelled 17 stores.

For the past five years Ace has run a 'coolest store' award program that recognizes local stores for customized service and innovation on boosting the customer experience.

The recent winners' efforts ranged from a vast outdoor greenhouse, a coffee bar unique gift shop and a garden center where customers can interact with skilled gardeners. One store also offered an extensive clothing department and gift shop featuring jewelry and local artwork within the store.

Another store was highlighted for providing shoppers a post office in the store as a convenience for local residents. One location boasts hitching posts outside the store for horse carriages still used by the community. Another retail location hosts informative sessions on owls, other birds of prey, bee keeping, and food canning.

In 2015 Market Force, a global research firm, named Ace as America's favorite home improvement chain based on consumers' satisfaction levels and shoppers' likelihood to recommend Ace Hardware to others. From the study, Ace Hardware received the top composite loyalty score of 61 percent.

"Ace Hardware ranked first in nearly every category, with particularly strong marks for organized merchandise and speedy checkouts," states the survey, adding Ace retailers are focused on fulfilling the brand promise -- to be the most helpful hardware stores on the planet

"It is through this caliber of excellent customer service that we can continue to differentiate our brand against the competition," said Ace's John Surane, executive VP, merchandising, marketing, sales.

Market Force said results illustrate Ace Hardware is living up to its brand promise of being the place with 'the helpful hardware folks,' as its associates were most likely to assist customers.

That's making for a fast growing fan base as Ace's loyalty program, Ace Rewards, boasts more than 34 million members and is viewed by Market Force as the most popular loyalty program among home improvement retailers by a large margin.



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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Top  
100

## Apple/iTunes

**Founded:** Incorporated 1977

**Headquarters:** Cupertino, California

**Workforce:** 110,000 fulltime

**Retail Locations:** 400+ stores (5.3 million square feet related to retail store space)

**Quirky Tidbit:** As of Oct. 2015 there were 800 million iTunes users.

**Survey Rankings:**

Customer Service: **#9**

Online Experience: **#18**

Brick & Mortar Experience: **#18**

Overall Customer Experience: **#13**

The first Apple retail store open in May of 2001 and its 'genius' bar soon became headline news, as did Apple's multi-pronged support approach to ensure customers and device owners were provided an easy way to get help from store staff. Users can schedule appointments online for support or one-on-one personal training or visit a store without an appointment. According to a Fast Company report, Apple boasts the highest sales per square foot of any U.S. retailer.

But Apple's big focus on creating a unique retail experience, as it announced its big wearable, the Watch, came when it hired on a retail expert in 2013. Angela Ahrendts joined Apple as senior VP of retail and online stores and was given oversight of strategic direction, expansion and operation of both Apple retail and online stores. In taking the role Ahrendts said the goal is to further enrich the consumer experience on and offline.

According to a Guardian report, Ahrendts' focus is to make Apple's retail locations a luxury goods sales environment, highlighting Apple's high end products such as the Watch and present a "sleeker and smarter" retail presence.

Ahrendts made the headlines in early January 2016, not for her retail strategy, but her compensation. She is Apple's top paid executive with \$25.8 million in total compensation for 2015, which is even more than CEO Tim Cook.



The retail strategy, Ahrendts told Fast Company, is refocusing stores around Apple's latest services, some of which are not products – such as Apple Pay. She views the Apple store as a 'big giant product' and aims to unify the online and offline Apple customer experience. Fast Company notes some new store may feature "The Avenue", which would put products and services literally into play in the store and not just be a product hanging on a hook.

In October, 2015 a New York Times report noted that Ahrendts was and is keeping a low profile and that Apple may be busy trying to figure out where the role of famed Jonathan Ive, chief design officer, begins and ends and where Ahrendts fits into the Apple design equation.

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

## AT&T Wireless

Top  
100

**Founded:** 1885 (as American Telephone & Telegraph)/1983 as current company

**Headquarters:** Dallas, Texas

**Workforce:** 243,620 (Q3 2014)

**Retail Locations:** 5,000+ (2,000 company-owned)

**Quirky Tidbit:** In 2014, AT&T averaged more than one patent per day.

**Survey Rankings:**

Customer Service: #48

Online Experience: #11

Brick & Mortar Experience: #71

Overall Customer Experience: #35

AT&T (or for those Baby Boomers, the former 'Ma Bell') has a long, rich, controversial and innovative history as one of the world's top telecommunications companies. For the past decade or more AT&T and Verizon have been battling for dominance in the mobile phone and wireless space and at times AT&T was the world's largest telephone and cable television operator. But those status accomplishments change frequently given increasing competition for the mobile consumer and business segment.

At a peak in the 1950s to 1960s, AT&T employed one million people. Its network carries 82.8 petabytes of data traffic on an average business day to nearly every continent and country and the telecom serves more than 3.5 million business customers, including nearly all of the Fortune 1000 companies.

In mid-January, 2016, AT&T announced it had added 1 million additional business customer locations to its fiber network over the past four years. It claims that more than 99 percent of U.S. residents are covered by its 4G LTE network.

In July 2015 U.S. regulators approved AT&T's purchase of DirecTV, a \$48.5 billion deal. The purchase will expand AT&T's pay-TV market share. The federal agreement includes several stipulations



including that AT&T expand its fiber optic broadband service to at least 12.5 million customer locations and offer low-cost Internet services for low-income households.

In mid-2011 AT&T initiated a new retail store design aimed at boosting the customer experience and began with one simple question: "How do we want our customers to feel when they walk into our stores?"

The new designs feature learning and community tables so consumers can play with devices and explore device features (the Explore Zone) as well as a Connected Experience Zone and Community Zone. There are no sales stations and store consultants use tablets to help shoppers at any point in the store. The goal turned the traditional over-the-counter transaction into a 'side by side' interaction.

Stores feature high-definition digital screens offering information on the latest promotion to the hottest product or service. In 2013 the effort earned AT&T the J.D. Power 2013 "Highest Ranked Customer Service Performance Among Full-Service Wireless Providers."

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

## Barnes & Noble

Top  
100

**Founded:** 1886

**Headquarters:** New York, NY

**Workforce:** 41,000 (including temp and seasonal employees)

**Retail Locations:** 640

**Quirky Tidbit:** Barnes & Noble hosts approximately 100,000 community events every year.

**Survey Rankings:**

Customer Service: #14

Online Experience: #19

Brick & Mortar Experience: #10

Overall Customer Experience: #5

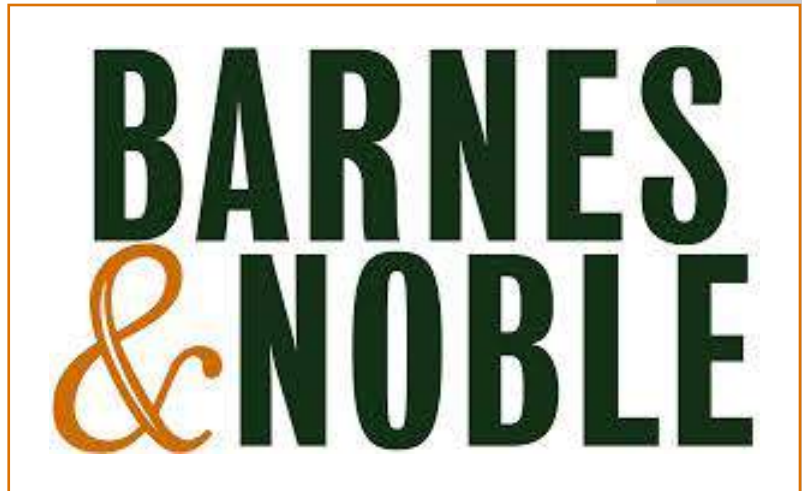
Barnes & Noble, since the bankruptcy of one-time competitor Borders, is the lone national bookstore chain left standing and operating in the U.S. and its biggest competitors are Amazon and independent and regional book sellers.

The bookstore chain has survived for a few reasons: an amazing assortment of books, magazines and even music and the fact it jumped on the e-reader and electronic book reading bandwagon early in 2009, debuting its NOOK e-reader and Free NOOK reading apps.

As a retailer its philosophy has long been focused on operating the best omnichannel specialty retail business that is "helping both customers and booksellers reach their aspirations," as its website relates.

There is at least one Barnes & Noble store in each state in the U.S. and its ecommerce website sells about 203 million physical books a year.

One reason readers immediately flocked, and continue to flock to Barnes & Noble stores, is due to the comfortable reading staging areas, which often include a café offering snacks and hot and cold beverages.



Barnes & Noble pours approximately 60 million beverages, bakes more than 6 million cookies and scones, and grills 3 million sandwiches annually.

The store locations often also include a roomy children's reading area where parents and kids can sit and enjoy reading together.

The book retailer is also big on giving back to the community and providing many consumer-friendly programs from its locations. One is the Kids' Club and another is the Educator Program, which gives teachers and classroom professionals a discount on purchases for classroom use.

Going forward in 2016 and the next few years, the landscape appears rosy for Barnes & Noble, at least according to one news report. As CBSnews.com stated the stock and market watchers are bullish about the bookseller despite the fact company shares dipped by 61 percent in 2015, and it announced intentions late in 2015 to close 10 stores. One online report claims the retailer's complete store count will drop to 450 by 2020.

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## Bed Bath & Beyond

**Founded:** 1971

**Headquarters:** Union, New Jersey

**Workforce:** 58,000 (as of 2014)

**Retail Locations:** 1,526

**Quirky Tidbit:** Formed by two discount chain management professionals who saw the department store model evolving into specialty retail opportunities.

**Survey Rankings:**

Customer Service: #10

Online Experience: #12

Brick & Mortar Experience: #14

Overall Customer Experience: #21

The home furnishings retailer is one of the newest retail institutions in terms of age, and competition within the domestic merchandise market is fierce. That doesn't mean it's lagging when it comes to innovative technologies and offering consumers the expected varied ways of shopping and purchasing product. Customers can buy in stores, online or using the company's mobile app. Its "Of a Kind" website offers special limited product offerings.

The strategy, according to corporate insight on its website, is striving to do more for and with its customer base by expanding merchandise, maximizing customer convenience and excellent customer service.

"The Company continues to grow, differentiate and leverage its assortment across all channels, concepts and countries in which it operates, to better engage with its customers wherever, whenever and however they express their life interests and travel through their life stages," states the website.

Bed Bath & Beyond subsidiaries include Christmas Tree Shops and That!, Harmon Face Values, buybuy

# BED BATH & BEYOND

BABY, World Market, and Cost Plus.

While Bed Bath & Beyond closed six stores in the fiscal third quarter of 2015, it opened five stores.

A Forbes report reveals the company is continuing to make investments in technology for providing seamless customer experience across its retail channels, and analysts believe an omni-channel platform is a key aspect for the company's growth and revenue.

In the omnichannel effort, it has developed a virtual coupon wallet. It has also added a social shopping option where users can invite friends and families to recommend items for their gift registries.

"The company is investing heavily in building its omni-channel strategy by creating services and experiences that are seamless across its digital and physical channels," states Forbes.

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

## Best Buy

Top  
100

**Founded:** 1966

**Headquarters:** Minneapolis, Minnesota

**Workforce:** 125,000+

**Retail Locations:** 1,400+

**Quirky Tidbit:** 70 percent of the U.S. population lives within a 15-minute ride of a Best Buy location.

**Survey Rankings:**

Customer Service: **#6**

Online Experience: **#5**

Brick & Mortar Experience: **#17**

Overall Customer Experience: **#6**

Initially founded with the name 'Sound of Music,' Best Buy became 'Best Buy' 17 years after it opened its first store. Another fun fact: Best Buy's open recycling program collects 409 pounds of electronics each minute the stores are open.

The year 2015 was a busy one for one of the country's top electronics retailers. The company ran a week-long "Pop-Up Tech Experience" at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport to help travelers with advice from Geek Squad Agents, tech demos and electronic devices. It also debuted a unique holiday gift option—a Geek Squad house call for a wide range of set-up services.

In addition, it was busy enhancing its mobile app with new functionality including 'blue assist,' which lets a user call for Blue Shirt advice right from the app. Best Buy also boosted store workforce training and tech expertise.

The electronics seller also opened a new technology development center in Seattle focused on mobile development, cloud engineering and the omnichannel customer experience. When fully operating it will house 100 employees. The company expects robust and breakthrough innovation to come from the center. One of those innovations is likely to be a new iPad app.

"Our customers are shopping both at our stores and online, and we want to create a connected experience," said Bala Subramanian, senior VP and CTO for Best Buy, in a release on the center.

Best Buy initiated a turnaround strategy, called 'renew



blue,' in 2012 which focused on refreshing store environments, boosting same-store sales, trimming costs, bulking up the online ecommerce site and improving relationships with vendors and partners.

Yet the 2015 holiday season wasn't too jolly as revenue dropped 0.8 percent and same store sales dipped by 1.2 percent, due to a softening of the mobile phone market. Best Buy saw a 7.2 percent decline in mobile phones for the year, according to Forbes. But there were some high points in its latest financial earnings report.

"Excluding mobile phones, domestic revenue increased year over year due to our strong performance in health and wearables, home theater and appliances," stated CEO and Chairman Hubert Joly in an announcement, noting revenue increased 12.6 percent on top of a 13.4 percent increase last year. "These results and our outlook are driven by the solid execution of our holiday strategy and the leveraging of investments in our merchandise assortment, digital capabilities, higher in-stocks, Blue Shirt and Geek Squad expertise and faster shipping. Ultimately, this performance is the result of the hard work, dedication and customer focus on the part of all of our associates."

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

## Cabela's

Top  
100

**Founded:** 1961

**Headquarters:** Sidney, Nebraska

**Workforce:** 10,000+

**Retail Locations:** 71 locations

**Quirky Tidbit:** The company started with a classified ad selling fishing flies and launched as a direct mail order business on the kitchen table of founders Dick and Mary Cabela.

**Survey Rankings:**

Customer Service: #19

Online Experience: #6

Brick & Mortar Experience: #37

Overall Customer Experience: #38

The final months of 2015 brought news of dipping store sales for the outdoor outfitter as consumers, due to warmer than usual fall and early winter temperatures, weren't snatching up winter apparel and footwear. But the outdoor gear company saw success from its new format stores, and sales in several core product categories including firearms, ammunition, home and gifts and camping were healthy.

Yet the less than stellar results from new stores' sales has the company re-evaluating projected store openings this year and Cabela's is initiating several efforts to boost new store productivity and profitability. It remains committed to having 225 stores at some point in North America.

Visiting a Cabela's store is not just a shopping event but a cultural experience and two of its stores, Kansas City and Owatonna, Minnesota, rank among the top tourist attractions for their respective states. Store locations typically include a cafe, fudge shop, gun library, a bargain cave, boat shop and service center. The stores also host educational seminars and demonstrations for consumers.

Cabela's offers 225,000 products across a range



of outdoor recreation and hobbyist interests, from hunting to fishing to home furnishings boasting an outdoor theme.

The first Cabela's retail store opened in 1987 in Kearney, Nebraska, 24 years after operating as a direct mail catalog company, and went online providing an ecommerce channel in 1998. It's currently involved in a \$34 million headquarters expansion effort.

"Since our inception, we have focused on the philosophy of building strong customer relationships and providing high quality products at a compelling value," states the company's background information.

That philosophy will be critical going forward as in early December 2015 Cabela's announced that its board is evaluating a wide range of strategic alternatives regarding its Vision 2020 strategy to boost revenue and profitability.

In late December, the retailer sold its Outdoor Adventures and Trophy Application and Guide Service businesses.

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

## Costco

Top  
100

**Founded:** 1976

**Headquarters:** Issaquah, Washington

**Workforce:** 200,000 worldwide (full and part-time)

**Retail Locations:** 698

**Quirky Tidbit:** Initial retail warehouse was launched in airplane hangars once owned by Howard Hughes.

**Survey Rankings:**

Customer Service: #7

Online Experience: #34

Brick & Mortar Experience: #1

Overall Customer Experience: #12

With 83 million members, representing 45 million households, Costco is the largest member-only warehouse club in the U.S. and most know it as the place to treasure hunt. Consumers can buy a package of 30 rolls of toilet paper, gallon jugs of mayo, electronics and appliances, and browse aisles of products packed upon pallets while enjoying free samples of food. Shoppers rely on empty product boxes for packing up purchases. Costco is big on providing seasonal merchandise and popular for its book and music department. In 2015, it sold 1.8 billion TVs, \$6.4 billion in meat, \$1.3 billion in seafood and 3 million Kirkland Signature (Costco's brand) dress shirts. Produce is sourced from 44 countries.

Last year it moved up from being the third biggest retailer in the U.S. to second place behind Walmart. It is the 18th largest enterprise in the Fortune 500, with 2.3 million transactions each day. Its five-year annual growth rate is 8.31 percent.

Among its most recent business moves, Costco announced it was opening an online store in China in October 2014. As of October 2015, Costco planned to open an additional 11 new warehouses before the end of the calendar year.



Its history is a merger success story. It began as a family-owned business called Price Club that launched in 1976 in San Diego. It then merged with competitor Costco in 1993 after Price Club owners turned down an offer from Walmart to merge with the top retailer's Sam's Club warehouse chain. The merged companies first became PriceCostco and the name changed again, in 1997, to Costco Wholesale Corp.

Many Costco locations offer shoppers a photo center, liquor store, optical center, pharmacy (41 million prescriptions filled in 2015), tire center and even in some cases, a gas station. It also offers members a multitude of services, from travel to investing to insurance plans, as well as home improvement services such as windows. According to a Media Post report the average Costco member is affluent, with an average annual household income of \$156,000. It's also a popular lunch spot for nearby workers given its food court prices are hard to beat – less than \$2 for a hotdog and soda. Costco sold 128 million hotdog-soda combos in 2015.

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

## GameStop

Top  
100

**Founded:** 1984, originally run by Babbage's, a Dallas, Texas-based software retailer

**Headquarters:** Grapevine, Texas

**Workforce:** 18,000 full-time employees

**Retail Locations:** Operates 6,457 retail stores throughout the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe.

**Quirky Tidbit:** Pre-owned and value video games accounted for 47 percent of GameStop's gross revenue for the fiscal year ending February, 2014.

**Survey Rankings:**

Customer Service: #37

Online Experience: #13

Brick & Mortar Experience: #24

Overall Customer Experience: #23

GameStop made some major changes this year, including a February promotion of Mike Buskey to executive vice president and president, U.S. stores. Buskey wasn't new to GameStop, however. He joined GameStop in 2010, as SVP of Human Resources. At that time, his role was to focus on building GameStop's overall organizational capability.

As president, his background in operations and HR, gave him the ability to create strategic alliances throughout the organization, resulting in better business, the company said in a press release.

The holiday shopping season also inspired GameStop to up its holiday play. In October, the retailer launched a holiday layaway program, allowing shoppers to reserve and pay for specific games and devices ahead of the holiday buying rush with a minimum down payment of \$25.

"The holidays have a tendency of sneaking up on people, and causing stress during a time meant for joy and sharing gifts with loved ones," said Eric Bright,



director of merchandising, in an announcement. "We have listened to feedback from our customers and are starting layaway earlier than ever before this year. By offering customers the opportunity to reserve and pay for a product over time through our layaway program, GameStop is making shopping easier and more affordable for gift-givers this holiday season."

To further the holiday cheer and to honor its core value of "protecting the family", GameStop decided not to open stores on the Thanksgiving holiday. Instead, it made Black Friday shopping easier with week-long events full of deals. Stores opened at 5 a.m. on Black Friday.

"We believe strongly that our customers and associates should have the opportunity to spend the Thanksgiving holiday relaxing with family and friends, and not worrying with the stress of where to find the best shopping deals. We know this is in stark contrast to what many other retailers are doing, but we are taking a stance to protect family time during this important holiday," Buskey said.

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

## IKEA North America

Top  
100

**Founded:** Founded in Sweden in 1943, by 17-year-old Ingvar Kamprad

**Headquarters:** Conshohocken, Pennsylvania

**Workforce:** 147,000 worldwide

**Retail Locations:** 373 stores in 47 countries

**Quirky Tidbit:** The biggest store in North America is located in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. The store measures 469,690 square feet.

**Survey Rankings:**

Customer Service: #58

Online Experience: #14

Brick & Mortar Experience: #29

Overall Customer Experience: #39

IKEA North America celebrated its 30th anniversary of U.S. stores in 2015, and made news for generating considerable profits from sustainable products, according to The Guardian. In the 2015 fiscal year, IKEA saw a 29-percent sales increase of products that led to a more sustainable life at home for consumers. Because of the success, its entire lighting range is now LED.

"We want to become resource and energy independent which means helping to transform the industry for our key raw materials like cotton and wood, investing in renewable energy and becoming more efficient in operations and supply chain is our goal," Ikea spokesperson Mona Astra Liss said. "This means making every product more sustainable while keeping the quality, function, form and affordability our customers love."

In addition to the advances that IKEA is making in



the sustainability business, it is also leading other companies when it comes to paying employees more per hour. In 2014, IKEA raised wages for its U.S. retail works and saw a reduction in employee turnover. Due to the success, the company is planning to increase pay again in 2016.

With a customer base as broad as IKEA's, executives created a strategy in 2015 to get a real feel for what its customers needed in different markets. How did it do this? It's simple. It made house calls. According to the USA Today, IKEA plans to make 1,000 house calls each year to determine what the average customer in each market needs.

"It's not so much about the product, it's about understanding how life is spent," IKEA U.S. President Lars Petersson told USA Today. "To create IKEA to become the leader in life at home."

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

# Kohl's

Top  
100

**Founded:** 1962, retail

**Headquarters:** Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin

**Workforce:** 140,000 employees

**Retail Locations:** Operates 1,162 stores in 49 states

**Quirky Tidbit:** Kohl's uses a "racetrack" aisle that circles the entire store, a technique borrowed from discount stores.

**Survey Rankings:**

Customer Service: #20

Online Experience: #24

Brick & Mortar Experience: #40

Overall Customer Experience: #13

During the 2015 holiday season, Kohl's literally never quit...well, for the final week leading up to Christmas, that is. The clothing and home store retailer decided to keep its doors open 24 hours a day for the week leading up to Christmas Eve. In order to gear up for the holiday season, Kohl's hired more than 69,000 additional workers to service their retail locations, credit operations and distribution centers, according to a Market Watch report. The increase in workforce placed an average of 50 more employees at each store.

"We want to ensure we provide the excellent service and easy experience Kohl's customers expect, whether shopping in stores or online," Richard Schepp, Kohl's chief administrative officer, stated in the announcement.

In September, Kohl's launched a variety of omnichannel and digital strategies to make shopping online and in-store easier than ever. The new initiatives included better mobile payments options, Visa Checkout online and even piloted same-day delivery in specific market areas.

"Kohl's is committed to providing our customers with an easy, convenient shopping experience in a way

# KOHL'S

that is personalized and engaging — no matter how each customer prefers to shop," Kevin Mansell, Kohl's chairman, CEO and president, said in a statement. "Our digital teams are continually testing new ideas and capabilities to create a world-class omnichannel experience that is seamless across devices. With each evolution, we aim to elevate our offerings for an easy, inspiring shopping experience."

In another move to better improve the online retail business, Kohl's named Sona Chawla, an ex-Walgreens ecommerce chief, as its chief operating officer for, directing the retailer's stores and digital business. The COO position was a newly created position for Kohl's and Chawla's main focus was to shore up its digital brand in light of increasing competition from online and offline retailers.

In addition to focusing on the digital improvement, 2015 also marked the year that Kohl's opened a test store built around selling only returned items. This store, called Off Aisle by Kohl's, included, like-new clothing, home goods, jewelry and accessories. The store will sell items at a discounted price, and all sales from the store will be final.

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

## Kroger

Top  
100

**Founded:** 1883, by Bernard Kroger 1883

**Headquarters:** Cincinnati, Ohio

**Workforce:** 422,000 employees

**Retail Locations:** Kroger operates, either directly or through its subsidiaries, 2,620 supermarkets and multi-department stores

**Quirky Tidbit:** Seventy-five percent of Kroger employees are represented by the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) union.

**Survey Rankings:**

Customer Service: #21

Online Experience: #25

Brick & Mortar Experience: #9

Overall Customer Experience: #8

Kroger made some major changes in 2015 in terms of incorporating data analytics. The supermarket chain looked to CIO Chris Hjelm to head up a new analytics subsidiary to direct research and development in order to better handle customer support and to drive consumer and customer engagement.

This change was put into place in order to use customer and consumer trend data regarding purchase activity to be more competitive in the retail food sales industry. The use of data analytics will make tracking data easier and help improve customer loyalty programs as well as personalized marketing campaign activities.

"Suppliers don't see the consumer side of the data on their own," Retail Systems Research Managing Partner Nikki Baird told the WSJ. "They can see in a given



store they've sold 1,000 units of corn in a day. But that doesn't tell you anything about who bought it and what they bought with it. That's where the opportunity is."

Data isn't the only thing Kroger focused on in 2015. It continued to up its investments in organics and fresh foods, and bigger, untraditional supermarket chains are following suit. It also expanded out of the continental United States and in April, announced its first supermarket to open in Hawaii. Aloha!

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

## L.L.Bean

Top  
100

**Founded:** 1912, Private Retail

**Headquarters:** Freeport, Maine

**Workforce:** 5,500

**Retail Locations:** 30 Stores

**Quirky Tidbit:** In the past five years, L.L.Bean has donated over \$6 million toward conservation and land stewardship.

**Survey Rankings:**

Customer Service: #15

Online Experience: #4

Brick & Mortar Experience: #21

Overall Customer Experience: #7

Last year marked a year of growth for L.L. Bean, and the company is looking to 2016 for further expansion. Outdoor apparel giant L. L. Bean will continue to expand in the retail market with a new 16,700-square-foot store in Virginia Beach. This is just the beginning of a plan for L.L. Bean to expand to 100 retail stores by 2020. The long-time outdoor retailer is also creating Outdoor Discovery Schools, which will be series of clinics and hands-on outdoor activities including snowshoeing, kayaking, stand-up paddle-boarding, archery and fly casting.

This is the latest move by L.L. Bean to give customers unique customer service, like their everyday free shipping. Although the company celebrated its 103rd anniversary this year, it is not stuck in the past. This year will mark the first time L.L. Bean is bringing in a non-insider to head their company, naming Stephen Smith as their new CEO.

"We are very pleased with the selection of Steve Smith as our next president," said Shawn Gorman, chairman



of the board. "Hiring a CEO who embodies the values of Bean was a top priority for the family and the board, and I am confident we have done just that. He has a deep understanding of and appreciation for customer needs, and multichannel retailing, which is well aligned with our approach here at L.L.Bean."

In September, former CEO and grandson of L.L. Bean's founder, Leon A. Gorman, died. The company announced a \$125,000 donation to a new scholarship fund upon Leon's death.

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

## Lowe's

Top  
100

**Founded:** 1946, Retail

**Headquarters:** Mooresville, North Carolina

**Workforce:** 265,000 employees

**Retail Locations:** 1,840 in the United States, Mexico and Canada

**Quirky Tidbit:** Lowe's won eight consecutive ENERGY STAR awards from 2003 to 2010, including four ENERGY STAR Partner of the Year awards for educating consumers about the benefits of energy efficiency.

**Survey Rankings:**

Customer Service: #4

Online Experience: #8

Brick & Mortar Experience: #5

Overall Customer Experience: #9



In 2015, Lowe's proved that bigger doesn't always mean better. In order to compete in cities, Lowe's opened its first New York city location, and it included a lot of interactive technology to make it as customer friendly and engaging as possible. This urban-format store opened in September in Manhattan, after more than a year and a half of planning, and its focus is on giving city residents appropriate sized home products, supplies and organizational home solutions to accommodate smaller living spaces.

"This is our first foray into Manhattan, and the first time we've been this deep in an urban environment in a true walking city," Jonathan Luster, Lowe's VP, market and concept development, told FierceRetail. "This is a brand new format, so you'll see things like small appliances that are in our big-box stores, but you won't see things like lawn tractors."

This new format included interactive customer technology, including computers with touch screens, so

in-store customers also have access to what the home improvement company is selling on its website.

In addition to the new city-friendly stores, Lowe's also went virtual in 2015 by launching the next-generation in-store and at-home virtual reality designing. The Holoroom is a new design tool that lets customers design the room of their dreams. This tool combines YouTube's 360-degree video capabilities with Google Cardboard to allow customers to share their virtual kitchen or bathroom designs whenever and with whomever they choose.

"The next-generation Holoroom continues to fulfill our long-term vision for how augmented and virtual reality technologies can help customers have more confidence and more fun with home improvement," Kyle Nel, executive director of Lowe's Innovation Labs, said. "We can't wait to see what our customers create as they bring their imagination to life with these new tools."

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

## Macy's

Top  
100

**Founded:** 1858, Rowland Hussey Macy, Retail

**Headquarters:** Cincinnati, Ohio

**Retail Locations:** 789 department store locations in the continental United States, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and Guam.

**Quirky Tidbit:** As of 2015, Macy's is the largest U.S. department store company by retail sales.

**Survey Rankings:**

Customer Service: #11

Online Experience: #7

Brick & Mortar Experience: #11

Overall Customer Experience: #15



Bringing in younger shoppers was a focus of Macy's in 2015. The department store spent more than \$400 million at its flagship Herald Square location in November to appeal to 13 to 22-year-olds. This new space, which is called One Below has everything the younger shopper might desire---including brands by Jessica Simpson and Madonna's Material Girl fashion line. In addition, there is a resting area that features an Instagram display where shoppers can see what other shoppers are buying, 3-D printing accessories, smartphone charging stations and a blow-out bar.

This new technique is the latest in several attempts that Macy's is making to woo younger shoppers, who typically are thriftier shoppers than their parents' generation. In the past, Macy's has established itself as exclusive and affordable, so it is hoping this One Below will be an attractive option for teens.

In order to take advantage of programs like Star Rewards, shoppers 13 years of age and older can create personal profiles with Macy's to get special offers via text or email as well as the ability to use the mobile wallet app.

Another way Macy's made progress in getting to know its customers was through the customer lifestyle profiles it developed to help staff understand their customer base. In addition, the use of social media is increasing company-wide. In 2015, Macy's ramped up its marketing strategy to include Magic Mirror, which gives customers the opportunity to share an outfit they like with friends on Facebook and get feedback. This new tool not only helps shoppers feel more confident about the fashion choices he or she is making, but it also serves as viral advertising for the department store chain--a win/win for everyone.

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

## Nordstrom

Top  
100

**Founded:** 1901, by John W. Nordstrom

**Headquarters:** Seattle, Washington

**Workforce:** 67,000 employees

**Retail Locations:** 323 stores operating in 38 states and Canada, which includes 121 full-line stores and 194 Nordstrom Racks, five Trunk Club clubhouses, two Jeffrey boutiques and one clearance store.

**Quirky Tidbit:** Nordstrom has both the largest number of store locations and the largest geographic footprint, and its stores anchor many upscale malls throughout the United States.

**Survey Rankings:**

Customer Service: #12

Online Experience: #26

Brick & Mortar Experience: #7

Overall Customer Experience: #3

Nordstrom's capped off 2015 with a little experiment in personalization and customization. Instead of being complacent with the state of retail, Nordstrom's stepped outside the box by introducing the company, Shoes of Prey, in a few of their department stores. Shoes of Prey is a company designed to help women create their own, unique shoes online. Nordstrom's placed the shops in six stores, in addition to serving as a major investor in Shoes of Prey as they expand internationally.

Another way Nordstrom looked to engage customers last year was by putting 'living services' to work within its spaces. In order to give customers products that they wanted most, Nordstrom began using weekly tracking of their customer sales as well as using the social network



site, Pinterest. Retail workers were also provided iPads to help them better serve their customers. To keep customers engaged, employees can help shoppers find trendy ensembles that have been pinned, and then shoppers can customize those to their specific styles.

Last summer Nordstrom launched TextStyle, a messaging service that gives shoppers a way to contact and buy directly from sales associates or personal stylists via text. Nordstrom continued its goal of reaching younger shoppers, who would rather text than talk. This service sends almost immediate responses, allowing customers to communicate and receive updates in a speed that today's shoppers expect.

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

## Petco

Top  
100

**Founded:** 1965, private retail

**Headquarters:** San Diego, California

**Retail Locations:** 1,300 across the United States, Mexico, and Puerto Rico

**Quirky Tidbit:** Petco owns the naming rights to the Petco Park baseball stadium, home of the San Diego Padres.

**Survey Rankings:**

Customer Service: #26

Online Experience: #45

Brick & Mortar Experience: #44

Overall Customer Experience: #24

In November, San Diego-based retailer Petco announced that it would be acquired for \$4.6 billion by CVC Capital Partners, a private equity firm, and the Canadian Pension Plan Investment Board. The retailer, who currently operates more than 1,300 locations across the United States, Mexico and Puerto Rico, was sold by TPG Capital and Leonard Green & Partners, which paid \$1.8 billion to take Petco in 2006.

In addition to its full-sized locations, Petco also operates more than 100 Unleashed by Petco locations, which are smaller neighborhood stores. The philosophy of "Think Adoption First" is a company philosophy that encourages pet adoption rather than the purchase of animals whenever possible.

Petco does not sell dogs or cats, instead sponsoring pet adoption events. The Petco Foundation helps match wonderful pets with families across the country. The Petco Foundation helps find homes for thousands of dogs, cats, rabbits and other animals each week. In addition to daily adoptions that occur in stores,



the foundation sponsors monthly weekend adoption events.

To encourage and reward those who adopted pets, during the 2015 holiday season, the Petco Foundation gave more than \$750,000 in grants to animal welfare organizations who helped save lives. The foundation awarded 53 different organizations grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$100,000 to help each continue their work with their local animal populations.

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

## Publix

Top  
100

**Founded:** 1930, George W. Jenkins, Jr

**Headquarters:** Lakeland, Florida

**Workforce:** 180,000 employees

**Retail Locations:** 1,114 locations in Florida, Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, Tennessee, and North Carolina

**Survey Rankings:**

Customer Service: #13

Online Experience: #95

Brick & Mortar Experience: #18

Overall Customer Experience: #14

Publix is continuing to prove why it deserves its current spot on Fortune magazine's list of 100 Best Companies to Work For. The company was ranked #81 last year, and kicked off 2015 with the announcement that effective January 1, 2015, health coverage would be available to same-sex couples regardless of place of marriage, as long as they are legally married. The privately-owned grocery company has more than 180,000 employees, and is proving that treating employees well can translate into company-wide success.

Even though 2015 wasn't extremely profitable for many grocery chains, Publix Super Markets Inc. had a record-breaking year and is looking to continue that success into 2016. In March, they announced that profits were up nearly 5 percent to \$1.74 billion, compared to \$1.65 billion the year before. In order to keep up momentum, Publix plans to invest \$1.3 billion in new store construction, remodeling and technology this year.

Innovation is one of the reasons for the Lakeland-based chain's success. To kick-off football season, it debuted four limited-edition NFL subs, complete with sponsorship deals with all four featured teams. The subs represented the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, the Miami Dolphins, the Jacksonville Jaguars and the Atlanta Falcons. To accompany the football-themed beers, Publix created a new shelf-tag program



to advertise and promote its craft beer. The tags serve as a way to better educate shoppers on the characteristics and qualities of each specific beer, like their bitterness and malt sweetness.

In April 2016, Ed Crenshaw is going to retire from his current position as CEO. Todd Jones, president of Publix, will be the new CEO, and will look to continue to expand on innovation.

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

## Starbucks

Top  
100

**Founded:** 1971, Pike's Place Market

**Headquarters:** Seattle, Washington

**Workforce:** 191,000

**Retail Locations:** 23,450 locations worldwide

**Quirky Tidbit:** The first Starbucks location outside North America opened in Tokyo in 1996; overseas properties now constitute almost one-third of its stores.

### Survey Rankings:

Customer Service: #17

Online Experience: #9

Brick & Mortar Experience: #19

Overall Customer Experience: #10

Starbucks is no stranger to the mobile app world. In July, the coffee chain announced that it was expanding its Mobile Order 7 Pay initiative into 21 more states, following a successful pilot program. This program has proved to be successful for two reasons. It helps store operators keep lines shorter and helps customers speed up their ordering process. This feature gives customers the opportunity to place and pay for an order from their mobile device or phone, and skip the line at the register. Instead, they can pick up their coffee from the barista.

With the battle to capture millennial business in full force, Starbucks' dedication to the use of innovative technologies is helping it win the battle. Starbucks reported in 2015 that 18 percent of its transactions were coming via their mobile app.

The fact is, Starbucks has employed a variety of strategies to secure extremely loyal customers, who come back several times a week. The integration of conveniences like the mobile wallet with its loyalty program called My Starbucks has allowed Starbucks'



customers a more secure and convenient way to get their daily caffeinated beverages, while at the same time, earning points leading to free or discounted products.

To further its customer service commitment, Starbucks also launched new services in 2015 including adding coconut milk as a dairy and soy substitute and is piloting a delivery service for its mobile customers.

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

## Target

Top  
100

**Founded:** 1902, by George Dayton

**Headquarters:** Minneapolis, Minnesota

**Workforce:** 347,000 employees

**Retail Locations:** 1,805 locations throughout the United States

**Quirky Tidbit:** Target sells more gift cards than any other retailer in the United States.

**Survey Rankings:**

Customer Service: #5

Online Experience: #15

Brick & Mortar Experience: #2

Overall Customer Experience: #4

In order to gain popularity with millennial shoppers, Target is spending time and resources adding positions in technology, as well as strategizing how to expand its brand into cities across the country.

"Not long ago, when you thought about that Target guest, you had this picture in mind," Target CEO Brian Cornell said. "It was that suburban housewife. She had a minivan. She was a soccer mom."

That's not necessarily the case anymore, and Target is capitalizing on this new shopper. In July, Target sent a group of execs all over the country to find out what customers want--and they found mobility was at the top of the list.

"Mobile, for them, is absolutely a way of life," Cornell said. "They want their demands met on their terms."

So, the company hired 400 technology employees in Minneapolis to improve its app, website and supply-chain technology. The use of Target's mobile app, Cartwheel, has been a success. The mobile app has exceeded 20 million downloads, and the company continues to do work to improve the app for customers.

In addition to improving its mobile presence, it is also changing the format of its stores in larger cities. In Chicago, Boston and in Minneapolis, Target opened



smaller-format stores to help appeal to younger, urban professionals.

"We're taking a very surgical approach -- aisle by aisle, category by category," Cornell said. "We've got a lot of work to do, and it's not going to be easy."

To continue to secure both the millennial and suburban shoppers, Target launched an online guaranteed price-match program prior to the holiday shopping season. This new initiative gives both online and in-store shoppers a 14-day window to request a price match of a competitor's price.

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

## Trader Joe's

Top  
100

**Founded:** 1958, by Joe Coulombe

**Headquarters:** Monrovia, California

**Workforce:** 10,000 +

**Retail Locations:** 457 locations

**Quirky Tidbit:** Trader Joe's is the market leader in organic and fresh food groceries in the United States.

**Survey Rankings:**

Customer Service: #16

Online Experience: #112

Brick & Mortar Experience: #8

Overall Customer Experience: #25

Trader Joe's has become the market leader of fresh food grocers across the country with its simple equation: great food plus great prices equals value. Last year was no exception. With its ability to study what customers want/buy, the California-based retailer is able to keep only the most popular items on the shelves. If a product doesn't sell--it's removed to make way for products that customers will like better.

One way it measures what consumers want is by its annual Customer Choice Awards. Customers cast their votes in November, and organic products dominated this year's list. This year's fan favorite was Speculoos Cookie Butter, which narrowly beat out frozen Mandarin Orange Chicken, The Trader Joe's Crew, Joe's Diner Mac 'n Cheese, dark chocolate peanut butter cups and spiced cider. These awards, which have been offered for the past seven years, give customers the opportunity to have a direct influence on what will continue to line the shelves of Trader Joe's.

Asking what customers like is just one way that Trader Joe's continually delivers customer service.



Other things like allowing customers to bring back ANYTHING they don't like has helped the grocer maintain a stellar reputation among its followers.

Trader Joe's continues to be well known for offering Two-Buck Chuck, and other alcoholic beverages for far cheaper than local liquor stores.

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

## Wal-Mart

Top  
100

**Founded:** 1962, Sam Walton

**Headquarters:** Bentonville, Arkansas

**Workforce:** 2.2 million worldwide, 1.4 million in the United States

**Retail Locations:** 11,598

**Quirky Tidbit:** Walmart is the world's largest company by revenue, according to the Fortune Global 500 list in 2014.

**Survey Rankings:**

Customer Service: #18

Online Experience: #3

Brick & Mortar Experience: #12

Overall Customer Experience: #11

Walmart announced in 2015 that it was planning to make shopping easier than ever. It began testing a free grocery pickup service, which gave customers the opportunity to select products online and then choose their pickup time. When the customer arrives at the store, an employee loads the groceries. As of September 2015, this service was available in 13 cities, and Walmart plans to roll out many more this year.

In addition to loading your groceries into your car, Wal-Mart began exploring drones for home delivery last year. The retailer asked federal regulators for approval to begin testing this service.

"Drones have a lot of potential to further connect our vast network of stores, distribution centers, fulfillment centers and transportation fleet," Wal-Mart Spokesman Dan Toporek told Reuters. "There is a Walmart within five miles of 70 percent of the U.S. population, which creates some unique and interesting



possibilities for serving customers with drones."

The retailer also vowed to make holiday shopping easier for customers in 2015. Walmart COO Judith McKenna said holiday shopping can be frustrating and chaotic for customers, and she said Walmart wanted to ease that stress.

"It's become a complicated game of figuring out how to get what you want at the best price. And for many people it's just not fun anymore. That's why we're making holiday shopping easier for you every day," McKenna wrote.

In addition to making life easier for its customers, Walmart announced that it will begin upping the minimum wage for employees to \$10 an hour in February. It will also be expanding associate training and hiring 8,000 more department managers.

"What does this mean for you? More engaged associates with specific training who will take better care of you. After all, our people make the difference," said McKenna.

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

## Walgreens

Top  
100

**Founded:** 1901, Charles Rudolph Walgreen

**Headquarters:** Deerfield, Illinois

**Retail Locations:** 8,229 locations in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands

**Quirky Tidbit:** Walgreens claims credit for the popularization of the malted milkshake (invented by Ivar "Pop" Coulson in 1922).

**Survey Rankings:**

- Customer Service: #8
- Online Experience: #118
- Brick & Mortar Experience: #15
- Overall Customer Experience: #20

Walgreens made news in November when it announced that it would become the first merchant to integrate its loyalty program into Apple's Wallet/Apple Pay system.

"We're excited to be the first to provide our customers with increased ease of access to their Balance Rewards account and information when using Apple Pay," said Sona Chawla, president of digital and chief marketing officer for Walgreens. "This offering supports our commitment to removing friction and enabling a simple and convenient customer experience."

With more than 85 million active Balance Rewards members, Walgreens' partnership with Apple could mean a more efficient check out procedure for many customers. Another way Walgreens showed its commitment to health care, while investigating innovation and engagement in 2015 was by offering virtual doctor visits through the use of the mobile app. Walgreens and tele-health service provider MDLIVE teamed up to give Walgreens website users 24/7 access to U.S. board-certified doctors through its mobile app. The service began with users in California and Michigan, and expanded to Colorado, Washington and Illinois by June. At year's end, it was available in 25 states, with further expansion being planned.



"Offering mobile and virtual access to board-certified doctors is a natural extension of the robust range of health services that Walgreens already offers," said Dr. Harry Leider, chief medical officer, Walgreens. "We're delighted to work with MDLIVE to provide our patients with a leading telehealth solution that will allow them to conveniently address their health conditions and needs with a medical professional."

The service, which is available in both iOS and Android, allows a customer to consult with MDLIVE board-certified physicians for a range of acute conditions. Because they are board-certified, the doctors can e-prescribe medications, and the visits cost \$49.

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# Top 100 2016

“While a little over a third of consumers who researched using their smartphone in store went on to purchase online, the majority (60 percent) convert in person at the business location.”

xAd, Mobile Path to Purchase 2015

## Mobile Taking Deep Root in Retail

By Robin Arnfield  
Contributing Writer,  
Retail Customer  
Experience

The year 2015 was a defining point for mobile use in retail. There was significant growth in consumer adoption of smartphones and tablets for retail decisions and purchases.

Retail Customer Experience polled consumers on their mobile device usage as part of its Retail Top 100 2016 report. The survey found that 56.8 percent of respondents had used a mobile device in a retail situation to find product data, comparison-shop or check product availability.

Retail Customer Experience also asked about the e-commerce or bricks-and-mortar store most popular with mobile users. Unsurprisingly, Amazon.com came top of the list, with 55 percent of those polled stating they would most likely use a mobile device while browsing and shopping on the world's top e-commerce site.

Mobile retail momentum grew throughout 2015 and peaked in the Holiday shopping period. From Thanksgiving through Cyber Monday, there was a 45 percent year-on-year jump in the number of U.S. mobile e-commerce shopping sessions and a 16 percent boost in mobile conversion rates, resulting in a mobile revenue increase of over 95 percent, Moovweb's 2015 Mobile Holiday Shopping Report says.

Shopatron, which provides cloud-based order management services for omnichannel retailers, said that, on Black Friday 2015, mobile purchases accounted for 50 percent of traffic at its clients' stores.

Website purchases on mobile devices are set to grow by 68 percent in the 2016 Holiday shopping season compared to 2015, predicts Bizrate Insights. During the peak 2016 Holiday season, mobile website purchases may reach as high as 42 percent of all online orders, or even higher with the addition of in-app purchases, Bizrate says.

A trend apparent in the 2015 Holiday e-commerce shopping season was the shift from PCs to mobile devices, particularly smartphones. Mobile devices accounted for 49 percent of online shopping visits on Cyber Monday 2015, according to Adobe's Digital Index.

Adobe says 46 percent of online retail visits in the Nov. 1-24, 2015 period came from mobile devices, resulting in \$6.3 billion in mobile sales.

When making retail decisions, 28 percent of consumers rely on their smartphones as their only source of information, a March 2015 survey for xAd's "Mobile Path to Purchase 2015" report found. Also, 32 percent of consumers use smartphones as their only source of information for grocery decisions.

Smartphones are winning over PCs at home, with 58 percent of consumers now using their phones at home even when they have other devices nearby, xAd says.

Smartphone use is increasing in-store, both for payments and for research. A Mercator Advisory Group U.S. consumer survey in June 2015 found that 50 percent of mobile payers had made mobile payments in stores at least four times a month, and 16 percent reported doing so at least 10 times in the previous month. In-store mobile payments are undoubtedly poised to take off, driven by demand from young adults, Mercator says in a Payments Journal blog.

xAd says 12 percent of smartphone shoppers were at a store location the last time they researched a purchase, up fourfold since its 2013 survey. "While a little over a third of consumers who researched using their smartphone in store went on to purchase online, the majority (60 percent) convert in person at the business location," xAd says.



# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

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## Academy Sports + Outdoors

**Founded:** 1938      **Headquarters:** Katy, Texas

**Workforce:** 23,000      **Retail Locations:** 200+

**Summary:** The \$4 billion company operates 209 stores throughout Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas



## Advance Auto Parts

**Founded:** 1932      **Headquarters:** Roanoke, Virginia

**Workforce:** 74,000+      **Retail Locations:** 5,200 stores

**Summary:** As the largest automotive aftermarket parts provider in North America, the nearly \$10 billion company serves both the professional installer and do-it-yourself customers. It has 5,200 stores, more than 100 Worldpac branches and serves approximately 1,300 independently owned Carquest branded stores in the United States, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Canada.



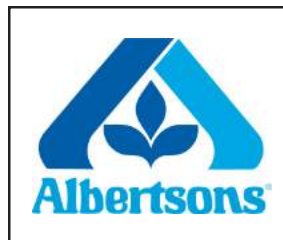
## Ahold USA/ Royal Ahold

**Founded:** 1887

**Headquarters:** Zaandam, The Netherlands

**Workforce:** 121,000      **Retail Locations:** 3,008

**Summary:** The big news in 2015 was Ahold USA's Stop & Shop division announcement to buy 25 A&P stores in New York in a \$146 million deal with The Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company. The international retailing group says it serves customers' changing needs by offering them their channel of choice via its omni channel strategy to help consumers shop anytime, anyhow and anywhere.



## Albertsons

**Founded:** 1939      **Headquarters:** Boise, Idaho

**Workforce:** Over 250,000      **Retail Locations:** 2,205

**Summary:** One of the biggest food and drug retailers in U.S. with one simple mission: to run really great stores and provide great customer service. In January 2015 it merged with Safeway and in July 2015 it filed for an IPO. The merger resulted in a total of 2,230 stores, 27 distribution facilities and 19 manufacturing plants with over 250,000 employees across 34 states and the District of Columbia.

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

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## Aldi

**Founded:** 1946

**Headquarters:** Essen, Germany

**Retail Locations:** 9,600

**Summary:** The discount grocer, which has more than 1,500 stores in the U.S. and nearly 10,000 globally, has succeeded by selling groceries cheaper than nearly all of its competitors. It captured even more attention, however, when it announced that it has increased the number of its organic products and is offering healthier options at checkout.



## Army Air Force Exchange

**Founded:** 1895

**Headquarters:** Dallas, Texas

**Workforce:** 35,000

**Retail Locations:** 2,440

**Summary:** It's the oldest and biggest of the Department of Defense's exchanges and encompasses movie theaters, online shopping, department stores and restaurants providing military personnel with U.S. goods around the world. With its slogan, 'we go where you go,' it offers tax free goods, and some exchange posts even feature high-fashion brands such as Coach.



## AutoZone

**Founded:** 1979

**Headquarters:** Memphis, Tennessee

**Retail Locations:** 5,609

**Summary:** The chain sells auto and light truck parts, chemicals and accessories through 5,141 AutoZone stores in 49 states, plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico in the U.S., 441 stores in Mexico, seven stores in Brazil and 20 IMC branches for a total count of 5,609.



## BarkBox (Bark & Co.)

**Founded:** 2011

**Headquarters:** New York City

**Workforce:** Unknown

**Retail Locations:** Online

**Summary:** BarkBox is a monthly delivery subscription service offering pet owners a way to get food, toys and products. The inspiration came when co-founder Matt Meeker couldn't find a pet retailer offering products he needed for his super large Great Dane. In 2014 Forbes named the site a top 20 to follow on social media.

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

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## Bass Pro Shops

**Founded:** 1971

**Headquarters:** Springfield, Missouri

**Workforce:** 20,000+

**Retail Locations:** 70 existing or proposed

**Summary:** Bass Pro Shops did more than \$4 billion in 2014, and last year in Memphis opened its largest store to date, a 535,000 square-foot center with two restaurants, a bowling alley, a 100-room hotel, an observation deck and the tallest free-standing elevator in America.



## Belk

**Founded:** 1888

**Headquarters:** Charlotte, North Carolina

**Workforce:** 24,700 (2014)

**Retail Locations:** 296

**Summary:** The privately owned department store is in 16 Southern states and has a growing digital presence, offering a wide assortment of national brands and private label fashion apparel, shoes, accessories, cosmetics and home products.



## Big 5 Sporting Goods

**Founded:** 1955

**Headquarters:** El Segundo, California

**Workforce:** 9,500

**Retail Locations:** 420

**Summary:** This sporting goods retailer got its name from its start as five Army-Navy stores. It now offers everything for athletes, from in-line skates to fitness wear, as well as hunting, camping, fishing and golf.



## Big Lots

**Founded:** 1967      **Headquarters:** Columbus, Ohio

**Workforce:** 12,300 (2015)

**Retail Locations:** 1,463

**Summary:** The publicly owned discount retailer operates 1,463 stores in 47 states with product assortments in the merchandise categories of Food, Consumables, Furniture, Seasonal, Soft Home, Hard Home, and Electronics and Accessories. The chain also supports the communities it serves through the Big Lots Foundation, a charitable organization focused on hunger, housing, health care and education.

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

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## BI-LO

**Founded:** 1961

**Headquarters:** Jacksonville, Florida

**Workforce:** 15,000

**Retail Locations:** 182

**Summary:** Primarily based in South Carolina, the Bi-Lo supermarket chain is owned by Southeastern Grocers, the fifth largest supermarket chain in the U.S., and has locations in North Carolina and Georgia. In October 2015 it enacted a new pricing approach, which cut prices on 1,000 products that three out of four customers had bought in the past month. It resulted in an average 17 percent price cut, though some product price were slashed in half.

BIRCHBOX♦

## Birchbox

**Founded:** 2010

**Headquarters:** New York City, NY

**Workforce:** Unknown

**Retail Locations:** 1 in Soho, NY; 800,000 subscribers

**Summary:** This New York City beauty and grooming retailer offers an online monthly subscription service that sends subscribers a box of four to five selected samples of makeup, or other beauty related products from 800 top brands. There is a women's and a men's line.



## BJ's Wholesale Club

**Founded:** 1984

**Headquarters:** Westborough, Massachusetts

**Workforce:** 25,000

**Retail Locations:** 210+

**Summary:** BJ's Wholesale Club is a membership warehouse club in the Eastern United States, operating more than 210 Clubs in 15 states from Maine to Florida.

Burlington

## Burlington Coat Factory

**Founded:** 1924 **Headquarters:** Burlington, New Jersey

**Workforce:** 28,000 **Retail Locations:** 546

**Quirky Tidbit:** Has collected over 1.5 million coats in eight years as part of its annual Warm Coats & Warm Hearts drive to help needy with warm clothing.

**Summary:** Burlington Stores, Inc. is a national off-price apparel, home and baby products retailer, operating in the United States and Puerto Rico.

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

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## Casey's General Stores

**Founded:** 1959 (1st real store 1968)

**Headquarters:** Ankeny, Iowa

**Retail Locations:** 1,850+ stores in 14 states

**Quirky Tidbit:** The very first Casey's General Store was a converted three-bay garage.

**Summary:** When the first store opened in July of 1968 the population of Boone was around 12,468 and the store carried two kinds of gasoline, common grocery items and 10-cent cups of coffee. Casey's is the fifth largest pizza chain in the U.S. and over 15 million pizzas made each year.



## Conn's

**Founded:** 1890 (plumbing company), 1934 as current name

**Headquarters:** Beaumont, Texas

**Retail Locations:** 90

**Quirky Tidbit:** The electronics, furniture, mattress and appliance store chain began as a plumbing and heating company.

**Summary:** Specialty retailer of furniture and related accessories; home appliances; a variety of consumer electronics, and a variety of products on a seasonal basis.

## Crate&Barrel

## Crate & Barrel

**Founded:** 1962

**Headquarters:** Chicago

**Retail Locations:** 170 (2010)

**Summary:** The privately held company is owned by the Otto Group of Hamburg, Germany, the second-largest online retailer worldwide. It operates locations throughout the U.S., Canada, Dubai, Singapore, Mexico and Turkey.



## CVS Caremark

**Founded:** 1892

**Headquarters:** Woonsocket, Rhode Island

**Workforce:** 272,000+

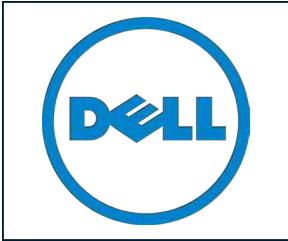
**Retail Locations:** 9,500 retail pharmacies, and 1,100 walk-in medical clinics

**Summary:** CVS Health has more than 70 million plan members, a dedicated pharmacy care business serving more than 1 million patients per year and expanding specialty pharmacy services. It recently bought 1,660 Target pharmacies and 80 clinics in 47 states for \$1.9 billion and will rebrand them.

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

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## Dell

**Founded:** February 1, 1984

**Headquarters:** Round Rock, Texas

**Workforce:** 108,800 **Retail Locations:** Unknown

**Summary:** One of the most familiar and successful PC hardware companies, Dell is now also an IT services provider, as well as storage and network player. As of 2014 it was the third biggest PC vendors behind HP and Lenovo. The big news in 2015 was its announcement it wanted to buy EMC for \$67 billion. It's big on customer engagement, providing a specific section in its 'about us' information page, noting that 'customers are the core of everything we do.'



## Dillard's

**Founded:** 1938 **Headquarters:** Little Rock, Arkansas

**Retail Locations:** 274 Dillard's locations and 23 clearance centers across 29 states

**Quirky Tidbit:** Last year Dillard's contributed more than \$850,000 to local Chapters of Ronald McDonald House Charities through the sale of Dillard's exclusive Southern Living Christmas Cookbook. Overall Dillard's has donated more than \$13.1 million since 1994 to local RMHC Chapters.

**Summary:** A major part of Dillard's marketing philosophy remains based on the founding selling methods, keen attention of day-to-day organizational details, alert selection of personnel and hard work. In 1991, the last storewide sales event was eliminated as Dillard's moved to a more balanced pricing approach. This pricing strategy was designed to help create loyalty and confidence among Dillard's customers.



## Discount Tire

**Founded:** 1960

**Headquarters:** Scottsdale, Arizona

**Workforce:** 16,046 as of March, 2015

**Retail Locations:** 900 stores in 28 states

**Summary:** The top global tire and wheel retailer began as a one-man business selling an inventory of just six tires in a rented building in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The company's 1975 "thank you" commercial is the longest-running TV ad of all time.



## Dollar General

**Founded:** 1939

**Headquarters:** Goodlettsville, Tennessee

**Workforce:** 109,000

**Retail Locations:** 12,300

**Summary:** The discount retailer did \$18.9 billion in sales in fiscal 2014 by catering to small towns that are often not big enough for a retail giant like Walmart or Target. Although it is not a "dollar store," it competes in the dollar store format.

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## Dollar Shave Club

**Founded:** 2011

**Headquarters:** Santa Monica, California

**Workforce:** Unknown

**Retail Locations:** Online

**Summary:** The company boasts 2 million subscribers, who subscribe for a razor delivery, and was valued at \$615 million in 2015. The subscription service (which does not require a contract) delivers personal grooming products on a set basis to consumers by mail. In December 2015 P&G Gillette filed a patent lawsuit against the company.



## Family Dollar Stores

**Founded:** 1959

**Headquarters:** Charlotte, North Carolina

**Workforce:** Unknown

**Retail Locations:** 8,100

**Summary:** The big news in 2015 was its acquisition by Dollar Tree in mid-year. Combined, the two powerhouse discount retailers will operate more than 13,000 stores in 48 states and five Canadian provinces, boasting sales exceeding \$19 billion annually and employing over 145,000 associates.



## Foot Locker

**Founded:** 1974      **Headquarters:** New York City, NY

**Workforce:** Unknown

**Retail Locations:** 3,423 stores are located in 23 countries

**Quirky Tidbit:** Each awards \$400,000 in college scholarships.

**Summary:** In 2015 the company updated its set of growth initiatives, and revised its strategic framework, intended to further elevate its long-term financial performance for the period 2015 through 2020. Its first priority: drive performance in the core business with compelling customer engagement.



## Forever 21

**Founded:** 1984

**Headquarters:** Los Angeles, California

**Workforce:** 30,000

**Retail Locations:** 723

**Summary:** The fifth largest U.S. fashion retailer, a family-owned business, is striving to become an \$8 billion company by 2017 and open 600 stores in the next three years.



# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

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## Gap

**Founded:** 1969

**Headquarters:** San Francisco, California

**Workforce:** 137,000

**Retail Locations:** 3,751

**Summary:** The clothing and accessories retailer is the largest specialty retailer in the U.S. and the founding family is still very involved in running the company. It was launched after one of its founders had a problem finding well-fitting jeans. Its brands include Banana Republic and Old Navy.



## Giant Eagle

**Founded:** 1931 **Headquarters:** Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

**Workforce:** 36,000 **Retail Locations:** 400

**Quirky Tidbit:** Number of unique items carried in each supermarket: 20,000 to 60,000, including more than 12,000 corporate and company-owned brand products.

**Summary:** One of the 40 largest privately-held and family-operated companies in the U.S. Five families formed Giant Eagle. Locations feature an Eagle's Nest, and an in-store, supervised learning activity center for shoppers' children.



## Grocery Outlet

**Founded:** 1946

**Headquarters:** Emeryville, California

**Workforce:** Unknown

**Retail Locations:** 238

**Summary:** The third generation of the Read family runs the discount retailer, whose mission is to provide "thrilling deals" to its customers. As the nation's largest "extreme value grocery retailer," it offers brand-name products at up to 60 percent off conventional retail prices. Most of its 238 stores are independently owned by local families.



## H Mart

**Founded:** 1982

**Headquarters:** Woodside, Queens, New York

**Workforce:** 2,500

**Retail Locations:** 50+

**Summary:** The Asian-inspired grocer specializes in the "freshest products, at the best price," with most of its units concentrated in the northeastern states of New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania. H Mart, however, has also expanded to the market and plans to open more in the area in the coming years.

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

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## H&M

**Founded:** 1947    **Headquarters:** Stockholm, Sweden

**Workforce:** Unknown    **Retail Locations:** 3,807

**Quirky Tidbit:** In 2004 it initiated designer collaborations starting with Karl Lagerfeld, Stella McCartney, Viktor & Rolf, Madonna, Roberto Cavalli, Comme des Garçons, Matthew Williamson, Jimmy Choo, Sonia Rykiel, Lanvin, Versace, Marni, David Beckham, Anna Dello Russo, Maison Martin Margiela, Isabel Marant and Alexander Wang.

**Summary:** Offers collections that are wide-ranging and varied for women, men, teenagers and children. Considerable resources are devoted to increasing sustainability. Included in the 2016 Global 100 Most Sustainable Corporations in the World (Global 100) index for the sixth consecutive year and ranked number 20 overall.



## Harris Teeter Supermarkets

**Founded:** 1936

**Headquarters:** Matthews, North Carolina

**Workforce:** 25,300

**Retail Locations:** 235

**Summary:** Owned by supermarket leader Kroger, Harris Teeter was founded in the Great Depression by two A&P employees (William Thomas Harris and Willis L. Teeter). Its official mascot since 1992 has been "Harry the Happy Dragon." Kroger bought the supermarket chain for \$2.4 billion in cash in January 2014.



## H-E-B

**Founded:** 1905

**Headquarters:** San Antonio, Texas

**Workforce:** 80,000

**Retail Locations:** 370 (2015)

**Summary:** The \$22 billion grocery chain serves 49 states and Mexico. It owns two other brands - Central Market, which competes with Whole Foods, while the Mi Tienda stores sell Hispanic foods.



## Hibbett Sports

**Founded:** 1945    **Headquarters:** Birmingham, Alabama

**Workforce:** Unknown

**Retail Locations:** 1,000+ stores in 31 states

**Quirky Tidbit:** 82 percent of stores located in strip centers.

**Summary:** Athletic retail stores in small to mid-sized markets, predominantly in the south, southwest, mid-Atlantic and Midwest of U.S. The company's primary retail format is a 5,000 square-foot store located in strip centers and enclosed malls. Each store typically lies within 150 miles of another store location.

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## Hy-Vee

**Founded:** 1930

**Headquarters:** West Des Moines, Iowa

**Workforce:** 78,000

**Retail Locations:** 240

**Summary:** The employee-owned corporation operates 240 retail stores across eight Midwestern states and reports \$9.3 billion annually.



## Ingles Markets

**Founded:** 1963

**Headquarters:** Asheville, North Carolina

**Workforce:** Unknown

**Retail Locations:** 201 six southeastern states

**Quirky Tidbit:** Ingles Private label products are named after Ingle's daughter, Laura Lynn Ingle.

**Summary:** Robert Ingle opened the first Ingles supermarket in Asheville, North Carolina in 1963 and the first facility was small, crowded and staffed by Ingle, his wife and a small group of employees. The chain owns a fluid dairy facility that supplies company supermarkets and unaffiliated customers.



## J.C. Penney

**Founded:** 1902

**Headquarters:** Plano, Texas

**Workforce:** 114,000 (2015)

**Retail Locations:** 1,020

**Summary:** Although it's one of the nation's largest apparel and home furnishing retailers, JC Penney's stock had dropped 90 percent over the last two years while it juggled CEOs. Now that the transition period is over and the company is firmly in the hands of CEO Marvin Ellison, analysts are predicting that the chain may produce its first quarterly profit in five years.



## J.Crew

**Founded:** 1983

**Headquarters:** New York City, NY

**Workforce:** Unknown

**Retail Locations:** 287

**Quirky Tidbit:** Every single piece is conceived in its New York City studio. Crew has been criticized for labeling its new super-small jeans as "size 000," and U.S. First Lady Michelle Obama is a big fan.

**Summary:** Initially born in 1947 as Popular Merchandise, selling low-priced women's clothing marketed through in-home shows. In March 1989, the first J. Crew retail outlet opened in Manhattan.

# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

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## Jet.com

**Founded:** 2014 **Headquarters:** Hoboken, New Jersey

**Workforce:** 100 as of January 2015

**Retail Locations:** Online

**Summary:** Jet has one goal: to beat Amazon at its ecommerce product strategy with lower prices, bulk discount (cheaper prices when customers buy more products as there are less logistics costs) and investors are on board given \$350 million in funding in late 2015 and another \$150 million in the works. Claims to already have a million shoppers on site and offers up 7 million SKUs.



## Lululemon Athletica

**Founded:** 1998

**Headquarters:** Vancouver, Canada

**Workforce:** 2,861

**Retail Locations:** 354 (2015)

**Summary:** The women's athletic apparel retailer has built a super loyal following by offering customers access to free events, including yoga classes and running clubs.



## Meijer

**Founded:** 1934

**Headquarters:** Grand Rapids, Michigan

**Workforce:** 65,000+

**Retail Locations:** 220+

**Summary:** Brothers and co-chairmen Hank Meijer and Doug Meijer lead the privately held company that operates more than 220 stores, while also supporting a wide variety of nonprofit organizations by donating more than 6 percent of its net profit to charity each year, and sponsoring hundreds of community events its customers hold dear.



## Menards

**Founded:** 1960

**Headquarters:** Eau Claire, Wisconsin

**Workforce:** 45,000

**Retail Locations:** Unknown

**Summary:** The Midwestern-based home improvement chain is the third largest, behind Home Depot and Lowe's, and was started by its founder who was doing house framing work. Its slogan, "save big money" illustrates Menards' focus – pricing and high-quality guest service. Guests are No. 1 and guests are always treated like family.

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## Michaels Stores

**Founded:** 1976      **Headquarters:** Irving, Texas

**Workforce:** 43,700      **Retail Locations:** 1,196

**Summary:** As North America's largest-specialty retailer of arts and crafts, Michaels has been reaping the benefits from predicting one of the industry's hottest trends -- coloring books for adults. The chain, which has sold the books for more than a decade, has a 15-percent market share of the adult coloring book business, based on BookScan data, and has seen about a one-third jump in sales in the past year.



## Micro Center

**Founded:** 1979

**Headquarters:** Columbus, Ohio

**Workforce:** Unknown

**Retail Locations:** 25 across 16 states

**Quirky Tidbit:** Founded by two former Radio Shack workers.

**Summary:** The first Micro Center store was a 900-square-foot storefront located in the Lane Avenue Shopping Center in Upper Arlington, Ohio. It sells products under a variety of its own brand names, which includes PowerSpec, WinBook, and IPSG. Locations offer free clinics run by tech support staff.



## Nebraska Furniture Mart

**Founded:** 1937      **Headquarters:** Omaha, Nebraska

**Workforce:** 2800+      **Retail Locations:** 4

**Quirky Tidbit:** Parent company is Berkshire Hathaway, Warren Buffett's investment firm.

**Summary:** Launched by Belarus-born Rose Blumkin, known as Mrs. B., on a \$500 investment. She then sold majority interest, in a handshake deal, to Warren Buffett. NFM's Omaha and Kansas City locations include 85,000 furniture items, 185,000 appliance/electronics and one million square yards of carpet. One customer testimonial: "Best managed and operated retail experience; Warren knows how to pick the best."



## Neiman Marcus

**Founded:** 1907

**Headquarters:** Dallas, Texas

**Workforce:** 15,000+

**Retail Locations:** 42

**Summary:** The retailer topped \$5 billion for the first time with fiscal 2015 sales of \$5.1 billion and is looking to go public. It filed paperwork for an IPO last summer with a \$100 million placeholder amount, but analysts predict that the company plans to raise in the range of \$800 million to \$1 billion.

# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

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## Newegg.com

**Founded:** 2001

**Headquarters:** City of Industry, California

**Retail Locations:** Online

**Summary:** The electronics-focused e-retailer has more than 28 million registered users and offers customers a comprehensive selection of the latest consumer electronics products, detailed product descriptions and images, as well as how-to information and customer reviews. Using the site's online tech community, customers have the opportunity to interact with other computer, gaming and consumer electronics enthusiasts.



## Office Depot/ OfficeMax

**Founded:** 1988      **Headquarters:** Boca Raton, Florida

**Workforce:** 66,000      **Retail Locations:** 2,200

**Summary:** OfficeMax is a subsidiary of Office Depot following a merger in November 2013. Now Office Depot and Staples are aiming to merge though federal agencies are challenging the proposal. Staples and Office Depot, in late December 2015, announced they intend to fight the federal challenge, stating in a release the "combined company would generate significant savings, and we're committed to investing savings in lower prices for all customers. We'll also use the savings to continue to invest in our people, technology and customer service."



## O'Reilly Automotive

**Founded:** 1957

**Headquarters:** Springfield, Missouri

**Workforce:** Unknown

**Retail Locations:** 4,523 across 43 states

**Quirky Tidbit:** C.F. and Chub O'Reilly, and 11 other employee/owners launch O'Reilly Automotive and sales the first year totaled \$700,000.

**Summary:** Auto parts chain that grew from one store in 1957. Total sales in Q3 2015 grew by 10.8 percent and the chain opened 58 new stores in that quarter. Expects to open 210 stores in 2016.



## Overstock.com

**Founded:** 1999

**Headquarters:** Cottonwood Heights, Utah

**Workforce:** 1,500

**Retail Locations:** Online

**Summary:** The online wholesale discount operation liquidates excess inventory and offers over one million products. Overstock.com acquired the O.co URL in 2011 and began incorporating it into parts of its brand. Now its online product portfolios include home décor, cars and furniture.

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# RETAIL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

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## PetSmart

**Founded:** 1986

**Headquarters:** Phoenix

**Workforce:** 53,000+

**Retail Locations:** 1,444

**Summary:** PetSmart, Inc. is the largest specialty pet retailer. It has 1,444 pet stores in the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico and about 202 in-store PetSmart PetsHotel dog and cat boarding facilities.



## Pier 1 Imports

**Founded:** 1962

**Headquarters:** Fort Worth, Texas

**Workforce:** Unknown

**Retail Locations:** 1,000+

**Summary:** Imported home furnishings and décor retailer whose first customers were post-World War II baby boomers searching for beanbag chairs. Products have included chocolate-covered ants to life-size Spanish suits of armor. Its mantra is "From Hippie to Hip."



## Rite Aid

**Founded:** 1968

**Headquarters:** East Pennsboro Township, Pennsylvania

**Workforce:** 89,346

**Retail Locations:** 4,572

**Summary:** The Fortune 500 drugstore and pharmacy is the largest on the east coast of the U.S., and third largest in U.S. Its first-ever store opened as Thrift D Discount Center in 1962 and changed its name six years later. It launched its latest loyalty program in 2015, called wellness+ with Plenti. Its first program debuted in 2010.



## Safeway

**Founded:** 1915

**Headquarters:** Pleasanton, California

**Workforce:** Over 250,000

**Retail Locations:** 2,205

**Summary:** Safeway was launched as a single store, called Skaggs, in Idaho. Just after a decade there were 428 Skaggs stores in 10 states and soon merged with 322 Safeway and became known as Safeway. In January the supermarket chain was acquired by Cerberus Capital Management, a private equity investors group.

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sears

## Sears

**Founded:** 1863

**Headquarters:** Hoffman Estates, Illinois

**Retail Locations:** 926 in United States, 301 in Canada and 66 in Mexico

**Summary:** More than one in five U.S. shoppers said they'd visit Sears first when buying a large appliance, according to Forbes, which noted that it has been able to, so far, ward off advances from Lowe's Cos, Best Buy and Home Depot.

SEPHORA

## Sephora USA

**Founded:** 1970

**Headquarters:** Paris

**Retail Locations:** 2,000+

**Summary:** Now with more than 360 stores in the Americas — including U.S., Canada, Mexico and Brazil — plus 500 inside JC Penney, Sephora has over 2,000 locations in 31 countries. The brand is known for its mobile app that allows client to play with 14,000 products from 200 brands.

STAPLES

## Staples

**Founded:** 1986

**Headquarters:** Framingham, Massachusetts

**Workforce:** 79,075

**Retail Locations:** 3,856

**Summary:** Biggest office supply chain was fast to move into ecommerce, integrating its stores into an online site by 2001. In early 2015 it announced it was aiming to buy Office Depot (which had merged with OfficeMax) but federal regulators aren't so keen and are challenging the acquisition. Staples has vowed to challenge the fed's lawsuit to stop the merger.

STITCH FIX

## Stitch Fix

**Founded:** 2011

**Headquarters:** San Francisco, California

**Workforce:** 1,500

**Retail Locations:** Online clothing stylist service

**Summary:** With the promise to be a "partner in personal style," Stitch Fix is every fashionista's dream and every stylist's nightmare as it takes the 'stylist' role online in a fast affordable approach. Users get five pieces to check out, and if they like they buy, if not they send back. There is no membership or subscription fee. Works with over 200 brands. It just released its iOS app.

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## The Fresh Market

**Founded:** 1982

**Headquarters:** Greensboro, North Carolina

**Workforce:** Unknown

**Retail Locations:** 168 across 27 states

**Summary:** This retailer is designed in the European food retail concept of smaller, open-air and old-world charm environment. The stores play classical music and supports local growers and charities.



## The Home Depot

**Founded:** 1978

**Headquarters:** Atlanta

**Workforce:** 371,000 (2015)

**Retail Locations:** 2,248

**Summary:** According to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, The Home Depot is the largest home improvement retailer in America, operating stores across the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands and Guam. It is also in all 10 provinces of Canada and in Mexico.



## TJ Maxx

**Founded:** 1976

**Headquarters:** Framingham, Massachusetts

**Workforce:** Unknown

**Retail Locations:** 1,119

**Summary:** Part of the TJX Companies, T.J. Maxx operates as a sister store to Marshalls, featuring similar store layouts and price strategies. But T.J. Maxx has more of a flair and high-end clothing and houseware product approach, promising a 20 to 60 percent reduction on original brand items. In April 2015 it opened its 20th store in the Miami-Fort Lauderdale area.



## Toys "R" Us

**Founded:** 1948

**Headquarters:** Wayne, New Jersey

**Workforce:** 66,000

**Retail Locations:** More than 1,800

**Summary:** The toy retailer, renowned for its annual holiday catalog, also operates the infamous FAO Schwarz brand and in 2014 kicked-off a new strategy, called TRU Transformation, aimed at bringing joy into customers' lives. It promises to be the easiest place to shop at fair prices.



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## Tractor Supply Co.

**Founded:** 1938

**Headquarters:** Brentwood, Tennessee

**Workforce:** 21,000

**Retail Locations:** 1,465

**Summary:** The home improvement, agriculture, lawn and garden maintenance, and livestock, equine and pet care retailer is all about products for the rural lifestyle, and initially debuted as a mail order catalog retailer focused on tractor parts. Its motto is TSC (Tractor Supply Co.), which also stands for 'totally satisfied customers.' Consumers can buy nearly everything needed in the rural communities except tractors.



## True Value

**Founded:** 1948

**Headquarters:** Chicago, Illinois

**Workforce:** 2,500

**Retail Locations:** 5,000 independent retail locations

**Summary:** The fiscal 2015 year was a robust one for True Value with retail comparable store sales up 3.4 percent year-to-date and gross billings up 6.1 percent. During the year the co-op deployed 690,000 square feet of relevant retail space.



## Ulta Salon Cosmetics & Fragrance

**Founded:** 1990      **Headquarters:** Bolingbrook, Illinois

**Workforce:** 19,000      **Retail Locations:** 715

**Summary:** The largest beauty retailer in the U.S. opened its first store a quarter of a century ago and has stuck with its slogan: All Things Beauty, All in One Place. There is a full service salon in each location offering hair, skin and brow services. Since 2009 it has raised \$10 million for the Breast Cancer Research Foundation.



## Verizon Wireless

**Founded:** 2000

**Headquarters:** Basking Ridge, New Jersey

**Workforce:** 177,900

**Retail Locations:** 2,330

**Summary:** As of January 2016 it was the top telecom in the U.S., with nearly 136 million subscribers and operates what it claims is the nation's biggest 4G LTE wireless network. It claimed in 2014 that its wireless network covered 98 percent of the U.S. and was operating 200-plus data centers in 24 countries.

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## Wawa

**Founded:** 1964    **Headquarters:** Media, Pennsylvania

**Workforce:** 22,000    **Retail Locations:** 640

**Summary:** Wawa was born in 1803 as an iron foundry and at the end of the 19th century, owner George Wood took an interest in dairy farming and launched a processing plant in 1902. But home milk delivery fell out of popularity in the 1960s so the family-owned business opened its first Wawa Food Market. "Wawa" is Native American for the Canadian goose found in the Delaware Valley. The chain stores carry more than 6,000 items and between 2000 and 2014 the stores served more than a billion cups of coffee, and averages 195 million cups a year.



## Wayfair

**Founded:** 2002

**Headquarters:** Boston, Massachusetts

**Workforce:** Unknown

**Retail Locations:** Online

**Summary:** The furniture retailer, initially known as CSN Stores, also sells home furnishings, luggage, toys, and pet items. Its brands include Joss & Main as well as Birch Lane. It describes itself as a "zillion things home" spot offering up 7 million products from 7,000 suppliers. A new TV campaign launched in January 2016 touts "Explore the Great Outdoors."



## Wegmans Food Market

**Founded:** 1916

**Headquarters:** Rochester, New York

**Workforce:** More than 58,000    **Retail Locations:** 88

**Summary:** The family-owned, privately-held supermarket chain announced two more store openings in January 2016, and both will feature the Wegmans full-service family restaurant within the store. Also in 2015 it was named one of the '100 Best Companies to Work For' by Fortune magazine, its 18th consecutive achievement on the list, ranking No. 7.



## Wendy's

**Founded:** 1969

**Headquarters:** Dublin, Ohio

**Retail Locations:** 6,500

**Summary:** The world's third-largest quick-service hamburger company is made up of 6,500 franchise and company-operated restaurants in the United States and 28 countries and U.S. territories worldwide.

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## Whole Foods Market

**Founded:** 1978 **Headquarters:** Austin, Texas

**Workforce:** 91,000 **Retail Locations:** 434

**Summary:** Whole Foods Market, known as the first national “Certified Organic” grocer, reported that its 2015 sales were approximately \$15 billion. It operates 434 stores in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom.

## WILLIAMS-SONOMA

## Williams-Sonoma

**Founded:** 1956

**Headquarters:** San Francisco, California

**Workforce:** 26,800

**Retail Locations:** 600+

**Summary:** The kitchenware and home furnishings retailer began as a hardware store in 1947 and its flagship store in 1958 drew culinary stars including Julia Child. Founder Chuck Williams celebrated his 99th birthday on a new location’s opening day in October 2014 at the site of the original store.

## YANKEE CANDLE

## Yankee Candle Company

**Founded:** 1969 **Headquarters:** Deerfield, Massachusetts

**Retail Locations:** Sells through a network of 35,000 store locations

**Summary:** The majority of the company’s candles are made by master chandlers (candle makers) in its manufacturing facilities in Massachusetts. The brand sells other products through a growing nationwide base of over 500 company-owned retail stores. It also has a catalog and online business, an expanding North American wholesale customer network (including approximately 19,100 specialty retailers in the U.S.), the Yankee Candle Fund-Raising division and international distribution.

# Top 100 2016

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