



INDEPENDENT RETAILERS IN MASSACHUSETTS: CAN THEY MEET THE CHALLENGE?

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Massachusetts has a rich retail history. Many of its retailers have provided national models and leadership. It is the home of Filene's, Filene's Basement, the TJX Companies, Staples, BJ's Wholesale Club, the Neiman Marcus Group, and Talbots. There are over 38,000 retail establishments in the state, an annual payroll of almost \$6 billion and employing 470,000 workers.

Obviously, retailing is vital to the state's economy, yet it is also evident that economic and social forces are changing the ways in which retailers, especially independent retailers, conduct business. The focus of this research was to determine how independent retailers in Massachusetts are coping in a very competitive market.

A 79-question survey was designed and mailed to 350 independent retailers in the state. The Massachusetts Retail Association provided the mailing list. Likert scales, multiple choice and rank order questions were utilized. A total of 135 surveys was returned, for a response rate of 39%. Frequencies and means of responses were tabulated for each question.

Retailers indicated that the state is supportive of business, even though some laws have adversely affected operations. Large discounters, the lack of qualified and enthusiastic employees, and the deterioration of downtown districts has hurt business. In order to combat these factors, respondents indicated that they have taken certain actions including changing their merchandise mix, increasing training and incentives to employees, increasing promotional activity, and providing increased customer service.