

# Clothing, Accessory, and General Merchandise Stores

(NAICS 448 and 452)

## SIGNIFICANT POINTS

- Sales and administrative support jobs comprise 83 percent of industry employment.
- Most jobs do not require formal education; many people get their first jobs in this industry.
- Clothing, accessory, and general merchandise stores offer many part-time jobs with relatively low earnings.
- Despite relatively slow employment growth, turnover will produce numerous job openings in this large industry.

### Nature of the Industry

Clothing, accessory, and general merchandise stores are some of the most visited establishments in the country. Whether shopping for an item of clothing or piece of jewelry, a household appliance, or even food, you will likely go to one of these stores to either make your purchase or compare selections with other retail outlets. General merchandise stores, in particular, sell a wide variety of items in their stores. This category is comprised of department stores, including discount department stores, as well as super centers and warehouse club stores. It also includes dollar stores that sell a wide variety of merchandise very inexpensively.

Department stores sell a wide selection of merchandise with no one line predominating. These stores generally are arranged into departments with a manager heading each department. These departments can sell apparel, furniture, appliances, home furnishings, cosmetics, jewelry, paint and hardware, electronics, and sporting goods. They may also sell services such as optical, photography, and pharmacy. Discount department stores typically have fewer sales workers, relying more on self-service features, and have centrally located cashiers. Department stores that sell bulk items, like major appliances, usually provide delivery and installation services. Upscale department stores may offer tailoring for their clothing lines and more personal service.

Warehouse club stores and super centers, the fastest growing segment of this industry, sell an even more eclectic mix of products and services in fixed quantities at low prices. These stores typically include an assortment of food items, often sold in bulk, along with an array of household and automotive goods, clothing, and services that may vary over time. These stores often require that shoppers purchase a membership in the store that entitles them to shop there. They offer very little service and usually require the customer to take home the item.

Clothing and accessory stores sell a much narrower group of items that include apparel for all members of the family, as well as shoes, luggage, leather goods, lingerie, jewelry, uniforms, and bridal gowns. Stores in this sector may sell all of the above items or concentrate on a few. They often are staffed with knowledgeable salespersons who can help in the selection of sizes, styles, and accessories. Many of these stores are lo-

cated in shopping malls across the country and have significantly fewer workers than department stores.

### Working Conditions

Most employees in clothing, accessory, and general merchandise stores work under clean, well-lighted conditions. Many jobs are part time, with the most employees working during peak selling times, including nights, weekends, and holidays. Because weekends are busy days in retailing, almost all employees work at least one of these days and have a weekday off. During busy periods, such as holidays and back-to-school season, longer than normal hours may be scheduled, and vacation time is limited for most workers, including buyers and managers.

Retail salespersons and cashiers often stand for long periods, and stock clerks may perform strenuous tasks such as moving heavy, cumbersome boxes.

The incidence of work-related illnesses and injuries varies greatly among segments of the industry. In 2002, workers in clothing and accessory stores had 3.0 cases of injury and illness per 100 full-time workers, while those in general merchandise stores had 7.7 cases per 100 full-time workers. This compares with an average of 5.3 throughout private industry.

### Employment

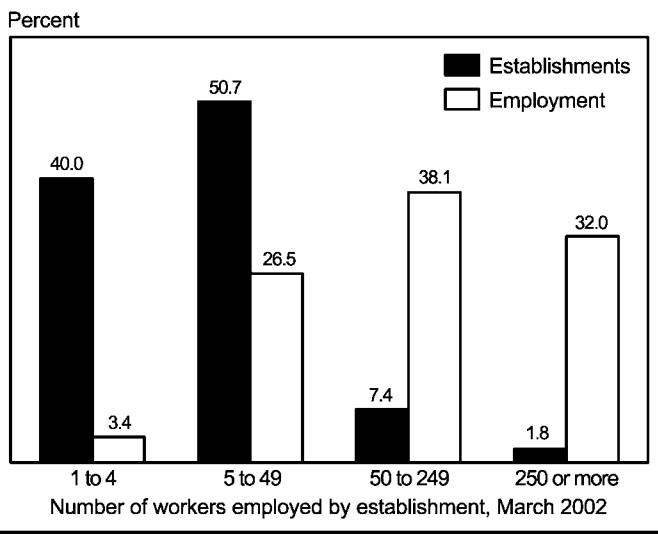
Clothing, accessory, and general merchandise stores—one of the largest employers in the Nation—had about 4.1 million wage and salary jobs in 2002. Department stores accounted for most jobs in the industry, but only about 7 percent of establishments. In 2002, about 7 of 10 workers were employed in clothing, accessory, and general merchandise stores with more than 50 workers (see chart). In contrast to many industries, this industry employs workers in all sections of the country, from the largest cities to the smallest towns.

Many of the industry's workers are young—31 percent were under 24 years old in 2002, compared with 14 percent for all industries. About 29 percent of the workers were employed part time.

### Occupations in the Industry

Sales and related occupations accounted for 65 percent of workers in this industry in 2002 (table 1). *Retail salespersons*, who

**Fewer than 10 percent of clothing, accessory, and general merchandise stores employ more than 50 workers, but they have 70 percent of the jobs in the industry**



comprise 56 percent of employment in the industry, help customers select and purchase merchandise. A salesperson's primary job is to interest customers in the merchandise and to answer any questions customers may have. In order to do this, the worker may describe the product's various models, styles, and colors, or demonstrate its use. To sell expensive and complex items, workers need extensive knowledge of the products.

In addition to selling, most retail salespersons electronically register the sale on a cash register or terminal; receive cash, checks, and charge payments; and give change and receipts. Depending on the hours they work, they may open or close their cash registers or terminals. This may include counting the money in the cash register; separating charge slips, coupons, and exchange vouchers; and making deposits at the cash office. Salespersons are held responsible for the contents of their register, and repeated shortages are often a cause for dismissal.

Salespersons may be responsible for handling returns and exchanges of merchandise, wrapping gifts, and keeping their work areas neat. In addition, they may help stock shelves or racks, arrange for mailing or delivery of a purchase, mark price tags, take inventory, and prepare displays. They also must be familiar with the store's security practices to help prevent theft of merchandise. *Cashiers* total bills, receive money, make change, fill out charge forms, and give receipts. Retail salespersons and cashiers often have similar duties.

Office and administrative support occupations make up the next largest group of employees, accounting for 18 percent of total employment in the industry. *Stock clerks and order fillers* bring merchandise to the sales floor and stock shelves and racks. They may also mark items with identifying codes or prices so that they can be recognized quickly and easily, although many items today arrive preticketed. *Customer service representatives* investigate and resolve customers' complaints about merchandise, service, billing, or credit ratings. The industry also employs administrative occupations found in most industries, such as general office clerks and bookkeepers.

Management and business and financial operations occupations accounted for 3 percent of industry employment. (Only managers located at the individual stores are counted in this industry. Higher level managers for national or regional chain stores with multiple locations are typically employed at headquarters establishments, which are classified in the management of companies and enterprises industry. This industry is not covered in the *Career Guide*.) *Department managers* oversee sales workers in a department or section of the store. They set the work schedule, supervise employee performance, and are responsible for the overall sales and profitability of their departments. They may also be called upon to settle a dispute between a customer and salesperson.

*Buyers* purchase merchandise for resale from wholesalers or manufacturers. Using historical records, market analysis, and their sense of consumer demand, they buy merchandise, keeping in mind their customer's demand for style, quality, and low price. Wrong decisions mean that the store will mark down slow-selling merchandise, thus losing profits. Buyers for larger stores or chains usually buy one classification of merchandise, such as casual menswear or home furnishings; those working for smaller stores may buy all the merchandise sold in the store. They also plan and implement sales promotion plans for their merchandise, such as arranging for advertising and ensuring that the merchandise is displayed properly.

*Merchandise managers* are in charge of a group of buyers and department managers; they plan and supervise the purchase and marketing of merchandise in a broad area, such as women's apparel or appliances. In department store chains, with numerous stores, many of the buying and merchandising functions are centralized in one location. Some local managers might decide which merchandise, among that bought centrally, would be best for their own stores.

*Department store managers* direct and coordinate the activities in these stores. They may set pricing policies to maintain profitability and notify senior management of concerns or problems. Department store managers usually supervise department managers directly, and indirectly oversee other department store workers.

Because they may be the only managers in smaller stores, *clothing and accessory store managers* combine many of the duties of department managers, department store managers, and buyers. *Retail chain store area managers* or *district managers* oversee the activities of clothing and accessory store managers in an area. They hire managers, ensure that company policies are carried out, and coordinate sales and promotional activities.

Various other store-level occupations in this diversified industry include pharmacists, hairdressers, material moving workers, food preparation and serving workers, and security guards.

### **Training and Advancement**

There are no formal educational requirements for most sales and administrative support jobs; in fact, many people get their first jobs in this industry. A high school education is preferred, especially by larger employers. Because many of the new workers in this industry are recent immigrants, employers may re-

**Table 1. Employment of wage and salary workers in clothing, accessory, and general merchandise stores by occupation, 2002 and projected change, 2002-12.**  
(Employment in thousands)

Occupation	Employment, 2002		Percent change, 2002-12
	Number	Percent	
<b>All occupations</b> .....	4,129	100.0	8.3
<b>Management, business, and financial occupations</b> .....	122	3.0	13.1
Top executives .....	63	1.5	9.8
Marketing and sales managers .....	8	0.2	21.9
Wholesale and retail buyers, except farm products .....	11	0.3	-2.4
<b>Professional and related occupations</b> .....	76	1.8	43.4
Merchandise displayers and window trimmers .....	11	0.3	17.2
Pharmacists .....	26	0.6	68.0
Pharmacy technicians .....	19	0.5	55.4
Opticians, dispensing .....	8	0.2	16.3
<b>Service occupations</b> .....	191	4.6	14.8
Private detectives and investigators .....	10	0.2	9.1
Security guards .....	28	0.7	10.0
Food preparation workers .....	9	0.2	12.5
Combined food preparation and serving workers, including fast food .....	21	0.5	21.7
Janitors and cleaners, except maids and housekeeping cleaners .....	43	1.1	12.4
Locker room, coatroom, and dressing room attendants .....	9	0.2	20.7
Hairdressers, hairstylists, and cosmetologists .....	19	0.5	11.4
<b>Sales and related occupations</b> .....	2,683	65.0	10.0
First-line supervisors/managers of retail sales workers .....	311	7.5	10.6
Cashiers, except gaming .....	581	14.1	11.4
Counter and rental clerks .....	17	0.4	21.9
Retail salespersons .....	1,697	41.1	9.1
Demonstrators and product promoters .....	16	0.4	16.6
All other sales and related workers .....	41	1.0	20.6
<b>Office and administrative support occupations</b> .....	752	18.2	-1.2
First-line supervisors/managers of office and administrative support workers .....	55	1.3	7.0
Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks .....	21	0.5	-5.7
Customer service representatives .....	61	1.5	18.9
Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks .....	82	2.0	0.4
Stock clerks and order fillers .....	392	9.5	-6.7
Office clerks, general .....	31	0.7	1.9
<b>Installation, maintenance, and repair occupations</b> .....	43	1.0	6.5
Automotive service technicians and mechanics .....	16	0.4	-0.9
<b>Production occupations</b> .....	102	2.5	4.9
Tailors, dressmakers, and custom sewers .....	15	0.4	-4.9
Photographic processing machine operators .....	15	0.4	4.8
<b>Transportation and material moving occupations</b> .....	160	3.9	-0.7
Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, hand .....	118	2.9	-3.5
Packers and packagers, hand .....	25	0.6	5.1

NOTE: May not add to totals due to omission of occupations with small employment.

quire English proficiency and may even offer language training to employees.

Salespersons should enjoy working with people. Among other desirable characteristics are a pleasant personality, a neat appearance, and the ability to communicate clearly. Because of the trend toward providing more service, it is becoming increasingly important for salespersons to be knowledgeable about the products and merchandise available. Some employers may conduct a background check of applicants—especially of those seeking work selling high-priced items.

In most small stores, an experienced employee or the manager instructs newly hired sales personnel on making out sales checks and operating the cash register. In larger stores, training programs are more formal and usually are conducted over several days. Some stores conduct periodic training seminars to refresh and improve the customer service and selling skills of their sales workers. Initially, trainees are taught how to make cash, check, and charge sales and eventually are instructed on returns and special orders. Other topics usually covered are customer service, security, and store policies and procedures. Depending on the type of product they are selling, sales workers may be given specialized training in their area. For example, those working in cosmetic sales receive instruction on the types of products available and the types of customers for whom these would be most beneficial.

Some salespersons are hired for a particular department, and others are placed after they have completed training. Placement usually is based on where positions are available. There are some salespersons, often called “floaters,” who are not assigned to a particular department; instead, they work where needed.

Advancement opportunities for salespersons vary. As those who work full time gain experience and seniority, they usually move to positions of greater responsibility or to positions with potentially higher commissions. Salespersons who are paid on a commission basis—that is, they earn a percentage of the value of what they sell—may advance to selling more expensive items. The most experienced, and highest paid, salespersons sell big-ticket items. This work requires the most knowledge of the product and the greatest talent for persuasion. In some establishments, advancement opportunities are limited because one person, often the owner, is the only manager, but sales experience may be useful in finding a higher level job elsewhere. Retail selling experience is an asset when one is applying for sales positions with larger retailers or in other kinds of sales, such as motor vehicles, financial services, or wholesale merchandise.

Traditionally, capable salespersons with good leadership skills, yet without a college degree, could advance to management positions; however, a college education is becoming increasingly important for managerial positions such as department manager, store manager, or buyer. Computer skills are extremely important in all parts of the industry, especially in areas such as inventory control, human resources, sales forecasting, and electronic commerce. Many retailers prefer to hire persons with associate or bachelor’s degrees in marketing, merchandising, or business as management trainees or assistant managers. Despite this trend, capable employees without a

college degree may still be able to advance to administrative or supervisory work.

## Earnings

Hourly earnings of nonsupervisory workers in, clothing, accessory, and general merchandise stores are well below the average for all workers in private industry. This reflects both the high proportion of part-time and less experienced workers in these stores, and the fact that even experienced workers receive relatively low pay compared with experienced workers in many other industries (table 2). Earnings in selected occupations in clothing, accessory, and general merchandise stores appear in table 3.

Many employers permit workers to buy merchandise at a discount. Smaller stores usually offer limited employee benefits. In larger stores, benefits are more comparable with those offered by employers in other industries and can include vacation and sick leave, health and life insurance, profit sharing, and pension plans.

Unionization in this industry is limited. Only about 3 percent of workers were union members or covered by union contracts, compared with 15 percent in all industries.

## Outlook

Numerous job openings will result from turnover in this large industry. Jobs will be available for young workers, first-time job seekers, persons with limited job experience, senior citizens, and people seeking part-time work, such as those with young children or those who wish to supplement their income from other jobs. Persons with a college degree or computer skills will be sought for managerial positions.

Overall, the number of wage and salary jobs in clothing, accessory, and general merchandise stores is expected to increase 8 percent over the 2002-12 period, compared to the 15 percent increase projected for all industries combined. The relatively slow growth is due mainly to limited job growth in clothing and

**Table 2. Average earnings of nonsupervisory workers in Clothing, accessory, and general merchandise stores, 2002.**

Industry segment	Weekly	Hourly
<b>Total, private industry</b> .....	\$506	\$14.95
<b>Total, general merchandise stores</b> .....	285	9.88
Warehouse clubs and supercenters .....	309	9.54
Other general merchandise stores .....	293	9.44
Discount department stores .....	289	9.42
Department stores .....	280	10.20
<b>Total, clothing and clothing accessory stores</b> .....	261	10.40
Men's clothing stores .....	325	11.66
Family clothing stores .....	256	10.27
Shoe stores .....	224	9.19
Women's clothing stores .....	214	10.22

**Table 3. Median hourly earnings of the largest occupations in clothing, accessory, and general merchandise stores, 2002**

Occupation	General merchandise Stores	Apparel and accessory stores	All industries
General and operations managers .....	\$22.15	\$22.11	\$32.80
First-line supervisors/managers of retail sales workers .....	12.71	13.66	14.28
Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks .....	11.68	10.94	13.16
Office clerks, general .....	10.46	9.86	10.71
Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks .....	8.68	9.09	11.26
Stock clerks and order fillers .....	8.34	8.10	9.26
Retail salespersons .....	8.04	7.84	8.51
Counter and rental clerks .....	7.80	8.24	8.31
Cashiers .....	7.41	7.40	7.41
Packers and packagers, hand .....	7.19	7.28	8.03

accessory stores, as discount department stores and super centers account for a greater share of apparel sales. Also bringing down employment growth is the popularity of super centers and warehouse stores that stress self-service and are less labor intensive than the traditional retailers. Employment in full-service department stores will grow the slowest, as more people buy from discounters.

There will continue to be keen competition among retailers; new stores will continually open, and others will close. Alternative retail outlets—such as mail-order companies, home shopping, and the Internet—have taken some customers away from traditional retail stores, but not as much as originally expected. Studies show that most customers use the Internet to research items and compare prices, but go to the store to make their purchases. Although online sales are expected to grow rapidly, sales at traditional “brick and mortar” stores probably will remain a major portion of total retail sales. Although electronic commerce is expected to limit growth of some retail jobs, it is increasing opportunities for Internet sales managers, webmasters, technical support workers, and other related workers as many establishments begin to offer their goods online as well as in stores.

Some companies are moving towards obtaining goods directly from the manufacturer, bypassing the wholesale level completely, reducing costs, and increasing profits. This trend may further limit job growth in this industry, particularly among administrative and managerial workers. Many of these stores, particularly clothing and accessory stores, are also highly sensitive to the changing tastes of consumers and to the economy. Guessing wrong on upcoming trends, especially several years in a row, or being unable to weather a recession can cause even large, well-established stores to go bankrupt or out of business.

Worker productivity is increasing because of technological advances, particularly among clerks, managers, and buyers. For

example, computerized systems allow companies to streamline purchasing and obtain customer information and preferences, reducing the need for buyers. However, because direct customer contact also will remain important, employment of sales workers who interact personally with customers will be less affected by technological advances.

### **Sources of Additional Information**

General information on careers in retail establishments is available from:

- National Retail Federation, 325 7th St. NW., Suite 1100, Washington, DC 20004.
- International Council of Shopping Centers, 665 5th Ave., New York, NY 10022. Internet: <http://www.icsc.org>

Information on many occupations employed in clothing, accessory, and general merchandise stores, including the following, appears in the 2004-05 *Occupational Outlook Handbook*:

- Advertising, marketing, promotions, public relations, and sales managers
- Cashiers
- Customer service representatives
- Designers
- Purchasing managers, buyers, and purchasing agents
- Retail salespersons
- Sales worker supervisors
- Security guards and gaming surveillance officers
- Stock clerks and order fillers