

Careers in Customer Service

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Employment Trends

The good news is the demand for skilled customer service representatives is expected to grow at a healthy rate through the first decades of the twenty-first century, powered by the numbers of products and services that demand customer support. The bad news is the job market will be highly competitive, and you will have to be as good at serving *yourself* with skill development as you are at serving customers to rise through the ranks.

Here are some interesting projections, courtesy of the Bureau of Labor Statistics *Occupational Outlook Handbook*:

- Employers hiring customer service workers will typically be expecting at least a high school diploma.
- Some of the characteristics common in successful customer service workers are strong skills in communications and communication technology, interpersonal relations, problem-solving, and all encompassed by lots of patience.
- Some of the larger employers of customer service workers include administrative and support services (15%), retail trade (11%), credit activities (9%), wholesale trade (8%), and insurance carriers (7%).
- Customer service workers may require special licenses to answer questions about insurance or financial services. Typically these licenses require passing a written exam, with preparation often provided by the employer.
- The median hourly wage of customer service workers is around \$14.64 per hour (as of 2010) in the United States, earning fulltime pay of some \$30,500 per year.

For much more detail on the outlook for customer service workers, including job prospects, qualifications necessary, working conditions, pay, and so forth, visit the [BLS Marketing Career Outlook](#) pages regarding *customer service representatives*. As you review the *BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook*, you may benefit by researching retail, marketing, social work, and similar fields, drawing upon your abilities in communications, sales, training, technical support, and related interests.

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OCCUPATIONAL OUTLOOK HANDBOOK

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Welcome to the Nation's premier source for career information! The profiles featured here cover hundreds of occupations and describe What They Do, Work Environment, How to Become One, Pay, and more. Each profile also includes BLS employment projections for the 2010-20 decade.

OCCUPATION GROUPS

- Architecture and Engineering
- Arts and Design
- Building and Grounds Cleaning
- Business and Financial
- Community and Social Service
- Computer and Information Technology
- Construction and Extraction
- Education, Training, and Library
- Entertainment and Sports
- Farming, Fishing, and Forestry
- Food Preparation and Serving
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- Installation, Maintenance, and Repair
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SELECT OCCUPATIONS BY

2010 Median Pay | Entry-Level Education | On-the-job Training
 Number of New Jobs (Projected) | Growth Rate (Projected) GO

FEATURED OCCUPATION

Cardiovascular Technologists and Technicians and Vascular Technologists

Cardiovascular technologists and technicians and vascular technologists use imaging technology to help physicians diagnose cardiac (heart) and peripheral vascular (blood vessel) ailments in patients. They also help physicians treat problems with cardiac and vascular systems, such as blood clots.

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BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook: <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/>

As you advance in a customer service position, you may be looking to grow into other related professions. Please spend 1.5 hours touring the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* career information in occupation groups and subcategories of:

Retail

- Sales Agents
- Cashiers
- Information Clerks

Management

- Advertising, Promotions, and Marketing
- Public Relations Specialists
- Sales Managers
- Training and Development

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Community & Social Service

- Health Educators
- Social and Human Service Assistants
- Social Workers

Twenty-First Century Job Skills

While it is hard to predict with certainty the rapid technological innovations for decades to come, we can be sure the workplace and requisite skills will be in constant flux. Yet, there are fundamental abilities that are certain to be essential now and in the years to come. These skills include an ability to thrive in a global workplace, communicate across multiple cultures, manage diverse international teams, and employ communication technologies to coordinate networked teams in decentralized settings.

Google's "Project Oxygen" conducted extensive data-mining on the company's best international managers and identified eight characteristics of its most effective leaders. These are traits you might work to develop in yourself, if you hope to rise into top positions within your own field and organizations:

- 1) Be a good coach, providing supportive suggestions to your workers, along with any criticisms.
- 2) Empower your team, rather than micromanaging and usurping team members' individual initiative.
- 3) Express interest in your workers' well-being, and get to know them as people and families apart from the workplace.
- 4) Be results-oriented, motivating your team towards success with a focus on removing obstacles to productivity.
- 5) Be a good communicator and listener, and be responsive to the team's concerns.
- 6) Help your workers with career development, using the same tools that have helped your own career to advance.
- 7) Have a clear vision, and keep the team moving forward towards shared goals.
- 8) Keep your technical skills sharp, so you can demonstrate rather than just direct.

Wisdom of Successful Leaders

The best lessons on how to achieve success frequently do not come from textbooks but from the mouths of those actually doing it. Not long ago, *The New York Times* conducted interviews with chief executives on the qualities most essential for achieving success, both as a worker and a leader. The five most critical X-factors, along with quoted CEO perspectives, are:

- 1) Passionate curiosity: the best CEOs are not always the smartest but are typically the best learners.
- 2) Battle-hardened confidence: “Tell me what adversity you faced, what you did about it, what did you learn ... the people I hire fall down, dust themselves off, and keep fighting the next day.” – Nancy McKinstry, CEO of Wolters Kluwer
- 3) Team smarts: “More than talent, I most need people who can build a team, manage a team, recruit well, and work with their peers.” – Susan Lyne, Chairman, Gilt Groupe
- 4) A simple mind-set: “Be concise, get to the point, make it simple. Bosses are not impressed with complexity.” – Adam Bryant
- 5) Fearlessness: “I have to have people who aren’t afraid of change but have an appetite for it.” – Mindy Grossman, CEO of HSN

Summary:

- Career opportunities in marketing and related fields should remain solid, but practitioners must be prepared for stiff competition.
- The Bureau of Labor Statistics *Occupational Outlook Handbook* provides extensive information on careers, using related skills in fields of communications, research, management, entertainment, public outreach and education, etc.
- Among the traits helping managers and teams to succeed are the abilities to be a good coach, empower the team, support workers’ well-being, focus on results, communicate and listen well, encourage career development, provide a clear vision, and keep skills sharp.
- The most successful leaders have a passionate curiosity, confidence, team smarts, a simple mind-set, and fearlessness.