

# What Does Your Store *Sound* Like?

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Have you ever walked into your store during a busy time, closed your eyes, and just ... listened?

Without the sense of sight to distract you, you can really tune into your auditory faculties and get a sense of how your store's sounds might affect your customers.

Start by identifying *noise*.

When you take time to "listen" to your sales floor, first zero in on any unwanted sounds. For instance, do you hear squeaky doors or carts? Are there annoying hums or reverberations from running appliances or the HVAC system? Do any employees have extremely loud or high-pitched voices that travel across the selling floor? Are multiple flat screens streaming with ongoing narrations that start to run together and add to the cacophony of sounds? Is your sound system playing music so loudly that it's getting in the way of verbal communication?

It's important to first pinpoint any noise in the environment, then remove or tone down the racket.

Next up, what's your store's acoustic rating?

Understanding the finishes in your showroom and their acoustic-absorbing qualities is helpful when it comes to reducing irritating noise. Soft materials will absorb more sound than hard surfaces, so a carpeted furniture department full of upholstered lounge pieces is going to be a lot quieter than an appliance department with a hard floor.

And don't forget your ceilings. Sound waves travel up and down, so high ceilings with exposed ductwork and hard underdeck will bounce the waves back to the floor, whereas lower ceilings with ACT (acoustic ceiling tiles) will absorb sound waves, eliminating a lot of the reverberation.

Now, not being a fan of ACT tiles within a retail environment (they make a store look like an office, which is where they are generally used), consider hanging ceiling clouds made of acoustic absorbing material in areas where noise is an issue. These clouds can also serve as fun, decorative design elements. Area rugs and hanging fabric are other ways to absorb sound in noisy departments.

So, what *should* your store sound like?

The auditory ambience should be pleasant and upbeat. Pleasant means customers don't have to raise their voices to communicate. Upbeat means the music or videos playing in the background put shoppers in a positive mode.

Studies have shown that most customers do like to hear music while they're shopping, and often say it kept them in the store longer. But what kind of music should be played? That depends on your target market, the product being sold and the day and time of the week. For instance, your higher-priced items may need a more soothing genre of music, while entertainment products might need a fun, fast-beat, party type of sound. It has also been shown that instrumental music is more universally appealing than songs that are sung.

You may also find that your weekday shoppers are different from your weekend guests. Perhaps they skew older during the week and younger (families) over the weekend? Select your music to cater to their tastes. Using a satellite system allows you to change the genres easily. Do not allow staff to play what *they* want to hear on the floor. Music is a big part of your brand; how is your music supporting it?

Finally, avoid making the environment too quiet. During slow traffic periods it's perhaps even more important to have some videos or music playing to keep customers from feeling conspicuous while shopping. A quiet store with few people on the floor can instill a sense that others are watching you. A selling environment needs some life to create an upbeat experience!

So listen to your space. Consider the acoustic-absorbing materials in your showroom, soften or eliminate noise and add the right measure of music. Your customers' ears will thank you.

**Want to learn if your brand measures up? Attend Lyn's education session at Summit 2022 on Monday, March 7. ◉**

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