

One size doesn't fit all: the change room dilemma

 By [Kelly Summerfield](#)

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Why is it that you can only take a certain number of clothes into the changing room at a time?



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Do you really have to get dressed, go back out, fetch the other items you want and repeat the process again? Is it really necessary? And if it is, why is the real reason for these policies and rules not properly communicated to the customer? It is so frustrating for the customer to try to understand these policies, and until management addresses them correctly, it will continue to be a determining factor in customer satisfaction.

Two mystery shoppers recently visited a major mall in the Pretoria region to determine if the policy regarding changing rooms, and all the drama that goes with it, has an impact on the customer's experience. They visited seven clothing stores that were recently listed as top speciality retail stores according to the South African Consumer Satisfaction Index.

Mystery shoppers' findings

Out of these, the average items of clothing allowed in each change room per customer is five or six. Two of the stores have no monitoring of the change room or policies, allowing the customer the freedom to take in as many items as they like. When asked why that many items were allowed in, not one employee was able to provide a reason. 80% of the stores regard accessories (i.e. belts and hats) as an extra item, but this is not communicated to the customer. This means that the customer could have chosen six items, but now has to leave items behind because of accessories that add to the amount.

Thus, six dresses with belts leave the customer with only three dresses to try on. This system is not really an effective use of the customer's time, since she has to try on the three dresses (six items), only to get dressed and repeat the process for the other three. When the mystery shoppers asked how to get the other items in, 50% of the employees said that they could be called to exchange the rest. However, when they were called, none of them responded. Furthermore, the same percentage of these employees checked the clothes on the way out. This again brings up the question regarding the actual purpose of the policy: if it is for security reasons, then why are the items checked going in but not coming out?

To buy or not to buy?

This begs the question: what is the purpose of the 'maximum items' policy and is it really relevant? Management should be made aware that these policies have an effect on the customer's overall shopping experience. The decision to buy or not to buy is ultimately made in the change room. Employees need to be trained to communicate these policies to customers to try to help in understanding the reasoning behind them. It should be the task of marketers to challenge management in terms of the relevance of these policies and to make management aware of the impact they have on the customer's experience. After all, why can't a customer take in 12 items, fit 12 items, and buy those 12 items - all in one go?

Kelly Summerfield is a researcher in the Department of Marketing Management at the University of Pretoria. Visit bcommarketing.up.ac.za for more information on the research the Department of Marketing Management is doing.

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