



- For Immediate Release -  
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## **Customer Service is Improving with Canadian Retailers**

Customer experience with Canada's department store chains has improved over the last two years. This, from a *RetailTrack Mystery Shopping* follow-up to a 2011 survey. The new study found an increase in overall customer experience of 11%.

The initial mystery shopping survey was conducted for CBC Marketplace, for their *Canada's Worst Customer Service: Store Edition* episode that aired January 2012. That survey looked at three retail chains in Canada: Canadian Tire, Zellers and Walmart. The latest survey broadened the list of retailers to include Sears and The Bay, but the same-chain results showed a marked improvement in customer experience.

### **Canadian Tire Leads the Charge**

The 2013 average score was 11 points higher than two years earlier, with the average now standing at 60%. Canadian Tire led the charge, taking over first place with a dramatic 26 point improvement. The latest survey has the chain at 73%. Zellers, now Target stores, improved by 7 points to 51%, and Walmart remained virtually unchanged, at 55%.

The results of the first survey of 2011 were not encouraging, with department stores receiving an overall failing grade of 49%. Zellers fared the worst at 44%, followed closely by Canadian Tire at 47%. Walmart eked out a pass at 56%.

### **Why Is Performance Improving?**

Shaun Belding, the CEO of The Belding Group of Companies, the parent company of RetailTrack Mystery Shopping, has this to say about the results:

*"The increased overall performance is a reflection of the effort and focus that all companies, globally, have been putting on customer experience over the last few years. Delivering positive customer experiences is no longer a 'nice-to-have' for organizations. It is now need-to-have. Customer service, customer-focused policies and processes, are absolute table stakes for any company that wants to be successful in today's hyper-competitive marketplace."*

*The tremendous increase by Canadian Tire is very impressive, although not entirely surprising. It is a Canadian company that is facing intense pressure from very savvy and aggressive US and Canadian retailers. Pricing, location, product mix are all kind of a blur for consumers as their options – both in traditional retail and online – have exploded. They know that to keep the hearts and minds of Canadian consumers, they have to provide a better experience than the competition. I suspect they have had a lot of internal focus on that over the last few years."*



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### **Why It Is Happening (Cont'd)**

Customer experience is going to be the dominant driver for business for the foreseeable future, Belding says. *“Consumer options aren’t going away any time soon. As the availability and pricing of products are creating more of a ‘commodity’ environment, the only area that is left for companies to stand out from the crowd is on the service and overall experience that they provide.”*

Companies that aren’t making customer experience their focus are definitely at risk, Belding adds. *“All the advertising and promotional gimmicks in the world won’t cut it if a company is getting highly visible negative comments on Twitter, Facebook and other social media. People are talking about us every day – about the experiences they have with us – and that global conversation is the currency of customer loyalty.”*

### **About The Study**

RetailTrack sent mystery shoppers into retailers in five major markets across Canada: Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary and Ottawa. The mystery shoppers acted as normal customers, interacting with staff and observing and recording key aspects of the service experience.

The criteria looked at were in the categories of:

- First impressions
- Availability attentiveness of staff
- Helpfulness, friendliness and knowledge of staff
- Convenience and store environment
- Overall impressions



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### **Here Are Some Of The Other Findings Of The Study:**

- The two new chains added, Sears and The Bay, scored 47% and 64% respectively overall
- The most significant improvements overall were in "Staff Helpfulness and Attitude", which moved a dramatic 21 points to a 75% score; and "Convenience", which saw a dramatic positive change of 23 points to an 80% score
- It is still hard to find help when you need it however, with "Availability of Staff" scoring 47% (although up from 43% in the initial study)
- When asked about their overall impressions in the stores and whether they would recommend them based on their experience, Canadian Tire again came out the winner, with shoppers giving them a 90%. Target and Sears fared the worst, tied with an average 52% score.

### **Additional Information**

#### **About The Belding Group**

The Belding Group of Companies Inc. is a 22-year-old Ottawa-based company that provides customer service and workplace performance training, consulting and measurement solutions for organizations globally.

The Belding Group has two divisions: *RetailTrack Mystery Shopping & Consulting*, which provides Mystery Shopping and Voice-Of-The-Customer services through the United States and Canada; and *Belding Skills Training & Development*, which is a global leader in designing and delivering customer service and employee performance training.

The Belding Group's extensive international client list encompasses a broad range of industries, including a number of Fortune 500 companies.



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### **Additional Information**

#### About Shaun Belding

Shaun Belding is recognized as a leading global expert on customer service, service recovery, employee performance and building positive workplaces. He speaks and writes extensively on customer service, customer experience and workplace performance. He is author of five books, including the “*Winning with the (customer, employee, boss, caller) from Hell*” book series, published in 10 languages around the world; and *Win at Work – navigate the nasties, get things done and get ahead*, which business guru Ken Blanchard refers to as “A winning formula for success.”

Shaun has been quoted around the world on radio, television, newspaper and magazine – including CNBC, BBC-TV, CBC, Reader’s Digest, The New York Times and London Daily Times.

#### Related Resources

Shaun Belding’s Customer Service Blog  
<http://customerservicearoundtheworld.com/>

The Belding Group’s Free *Winning At Work* Newsletter  
[http://beldingskills.com/winning\\_at\\_work](http://beldingskills.com/winning_at_work)

The Belding Group’s *Customer Service Champions* LinkedIn Group  
<http://www.linkedin.com/groups/Customer-Service-Champions-1815345>

CBC Marketplace Canada’s Worst Customer Service episode  
<http://www.cbc.ca/marketplace/m/episodes/2012-episodes/canadas-worst-customer-service-store-edition>

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