Retail buyer

Job description
A retail buyer is responsible for planning, selecting and purchasing quantities of goods and merchandise that are sold in retail stores. They source new and review existing goods to ensure their products remain competitive. Most buyers, including those working in large department stores, tend to specialise in one product type (e.g., clothes, fashion accessories, food and drink, books, furniture, electrical items or household goods) while those who work for smaller stores buy a variety of products.

Work activities
- Liaising with existing suppliers and negotiating contracts
- Sourcing and building relations with new suppliers
- Sourcing and selecting new products through catalogs and by attending national and international trade fairs and events
- Monitoring market changes, competitor prices and products
- Analysing past sales patterns to anticipate trends in consumer buying pattern
- Recommending clearance sales and varying delivery schedules to help control stock levels
- Presenting new ranges to retail managers
- Assisting visual merchandisers in planning store layouts to promote key lines
- Working with the advertising department in order to present sales promotions.

Work conditions
Travel: depending on the product, travel can be a regular feature of the job including overseas to trade fairs and events (particularly for fashion buyers) during the buying season. Out of the buying season the job is often office based, although some travel to stores may be required.

Working hours: while the travel involved may mean working some evenings and weekends, buyers tend to work regular hours over Monday to Friday.

Location: mainly in large towns and cities throughout the country.

Opportunities for self-employment: not common.

Typical employers
- Large department stores
- Supermarkets
- Chain stores specialising in particular products (e.g., electrical goods, fashion outlets)
- Bookshops
- Craft shops
- Gift shops
- Newsagents
- Home improvements/DIY
- Furniture and home furnishings
- Mail order companies
- Internet retailers.

Career development
While this career offers opportunities for progression, it is highly competitive. Progression from junior/trainee buyer to assistant buyer and then through to senior buyer is possible. Relocation or moving companies may be necessary to progress.
Salaries
Salaries will vary depending on employer and location.
Republic of Ireland: Starting salaries €20,000–€30,000. Senior buyers can expect considerably higher salaries in excess of €60,000.
Northern Ireland: Starting salaries for junior buyers £19,000–£25,000, depending on the retailer and location. Assistant buyers/buyers can expect £27,000–£40,000 and top purchasing managers over £55,000 per year.
Non-pay benefits such as performance related bonuses, in-store and cross-store discounts, or company cars can top up your basic salary considerably.

Entry requirements and training
Open to non-graduates and graduates of all disciplines.

Other relevant degree subjects
• Business
• Fashion
• Management
• Marketing
• Retail management

Postgraduate study
A pre-entry postgraduate qualification is not usually required.

Training
Mainly on-the-job training. Some large retailers offer graduate development programmes that may include buying.

Tips for applications
A period of work as a retail assistant and in merchandising and marketing can be hugely beneficial when applying for jobs, as there is a lot of competition for entry-level positions.

Skills and qualities
• Commercial acumen and a passion for the sector and its products
• An understanding of what motivates customers to buy individual products
• Confidence combined with negotiating, influencing and networking skills
• Creativity and attention to detail
• Ability to prioritise and multitask
• Excellent analytical skills and the ability to make major decisions
• Customer focus
• Teamworking and leadership skills
• Numeracy and IT skills.

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