

Careers in Consumerism

CONSUMERISM is a movement to protect the rights and interests of buyers or consumers. Can you think of some careers that aim to protect or help consumers in some way? There are a variety of jobs in the consumer-skills field, from advocates and reporters to product testers and financial planners.



Objective:



Identify careers in the consumer-skills field.

Key Terms:



consumer advocate
consumer reports
consumer-skills field
credit counselors
customer-service representative
product demonstrators

Consumer-Skills Careers

If the consumer-skills field interests you, take time to investigate possible careers. Some require a high school education, while other jobs require training and/or college degrees. Some jobs require workers to interact closely with consumers, while other jobs allow employees to work independently.

CONSUMER-SKILLS FIELD

The **consumer-skills field** is an area that involves assisting customers to representing product lines to developing market plans for major industries. The three levels of careers in this field are entry level, technical, and professional.

Entry-Level Careers

Entry-level careers start after high school with little or no training. A **customer-service representative** is a person who helps customers with questions and concerns. Meanwhile, **product demonstrators** are people who distribute samples, products, and/or coupons. **Consumer reports** are articles about consumer concerns. Other examples of entry-level jobs are personal shoppers and residential-energy auditors.

Technical-Level Careers

Technical-level careers require some post-secondary training. For instance, **credit counselors** are people who advise consumers on credit matters. Another option is food-product testers—people who receive products to test for companies. In addition, public-relations representatives advocate for business or nonprofit groups to build positive relationships with the public. Other examples of technical jobs are commercial-energy auditors and consumer news writers.

Professional-Level Careers

Professional-level careers require college, university, or a post-graduate degree. Financial planners, for instance, help the public make investments and financial decisions. Product research and development employees conduct research and develop new products or refine existing ones. **Consumer advocates** are people who represent consumers in dealing with various problems. Other examples of professional careers are consumer newscasters and energy-efficiency specialists.

EMPLOYMENT

Students in the consumerism field learn employment and management skills for careers in consumer communications; energy, environment, and resource management; product development, testing, and demonstration; personal and family financial management; and personal services.

Occupation-specific curriculum includes research; advertising and public consumer relations; energy efficiency, waste management, and consumer programs; product information; testing procedures, labeling, and demonstration techniques; economics and personal finance; consumer credit; and selection of product merchandise and services.

The need for educated and informed consumer specialists has increased significantly. The increased interest in energy efficiency and other environmental issues will affect the manner in which products are developed and made as well as the manner in which they are promoted and offered to the public. Hot employment areas in this field include research and development for “niche” markets (e.g., baby boomers) as well as industry globalization, which allow entry into foreign markets. Employment of product managers, category managers, and logistics engineers is expected to increase in the next 10 years.



ON THE JOB...

CAREER CONNECTION: Product Demonstrator

The majority of product demonstrators work part time, which makes it an appealing job for seniors, students, or mothers who do not want a full-time job. In addition, the work may be temporary or seasonal, with more jobs available during the holiday seasons. The average pay is around \$11 per hour, but some positions selling higher-priced items may pay up to \$20 per hour.

The job rarely requires any formal education beyond a high school diploma. Most positions require on-the-job training. You may be given a script to recite to customers. For example, if you are passing out samples of a new type of baked potato chips, you may be asked to say, “Would you like a sample of Bob’s Baked Chips? They have half the fat of regular potato chips, and they come in plain, barbeque, and ranch flavors. They are on sale

\$2 per bag right now.” A job handing out samples of pizza or yogurt in a grocery store may require a few minutes of training, whereas a job demonstrating a computer or working at a cosmetics counter may require more extensive training. There may be a script, and you may have to learn facts about the products, so you will be able to answer customers’ questions.

Product demonstrators often are hired by third-party companies. You may give out samples of yogurt in a grocery store without working for the yogurt company or the store. Instead a third party contracts with businesses to provide demonstrators. So you might be asked to give samples of yogurt one day and juice the next. Product demonstrators may work long hours and likely are on their feet all day. Night and weekend hours may be required. Workers should enjoy working with people and must have good communication skills.



Product demonstrators may hand out samples and offer customers additional product information.

INVESTIGATING CAREERS

Conduct your own research to learn more about a specific career in this field. Determine the specific training or education needed for the job. Discover the expected earnings. Find the expected job prospects, and determine what workers do on the job. Learn more about the working conditions, and list any related occupations for the career.

Summary:



The consumer-skills field involves assisting customers to representing product lines to developing market plans for major industries. Entry-level careers start after high

school with little or no training. Technical-level careers, however, require some post-secondary training. Professional-level careers require college, university, or a post-graduate degree.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. Describe the consumer-skills field.
2. Describe two entry-level consumer-skills careers.
3. Describe two technical consumer-skills careers.
4. Describe two professional consumer-skills careers.
5. What are some niche markets?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Identify a person currently in a consumer-skills career. If possible, arrange to visit that employee in the workplace, so you can see firsthand what the job involves. If it is not possible to shadow the worker on the job, interview that person about his or her job duties. Ask about the education and experience requirements for the position. Also, find out why the employee chose that particular job and if he or she has had related jobs in the past.

Web Links:



Consumer Advocate

http://www.timduffy.com/letters/becoming_an_advocate.htm

Consumer Reporter

<http://www.mymajors.com/careers-and-jobs/Consumer-Reporter>

Financial Adviser

<http://money.usnews.com/careers/best-jobs/financial-adviser>