
Retailing's Next Frontier: "The Efficient Consumer"

by Willard N. Ander, Jr.

EasyEST Position Revisited

EasyEST, as defined in our original EST model, meant "providing the best customer service." Our studies suggested the four keys to becoming the EasyEST were:

- Having the products your target customers want and having them in-stock and/or available in the time frame they want them;
- Not wasting customers' time;
- Providing the information customers need to find the merchandise they want and to help them decide which specific items to buy;
- Creating a friendly shopping environment.

These have been ordered by importance to the customer, with the first being the most important.

As pressures on consumers' time have continued to build and as time has become more important in the consumer's decision on where to shop, many product categories and/or shopping occasions require retailers to focus purely on "speed." Most customers today have only a small burst of time to complete their shopping activities, and these consumers are looking for retailers who are the quickest at meeting their specific shopping needs for that trip. In most of these occasions, customers already know what they want ahead of time. They just want to find a retailer who has the competence and reliability to consistently provide the product or service in the

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least amount of total time. Sometimes the shopping trip may be combined with other activities, and sometimes it may be done alone. In either case, being fastest or quickest alone can provide a winning retail positioning.

Other retailers originally classified as EasyEST are winning by helping customers solve problems. For their customers, productivity means shopping a store that helps them efficiently find creative solutions to their shopping needs. Most of these customers do not know what they want. They are looking for ideas, products, or services that will help them find a desirable solution. Raw speed is not as critical here, but efficiency—solving the need without wasting customers' time—is.

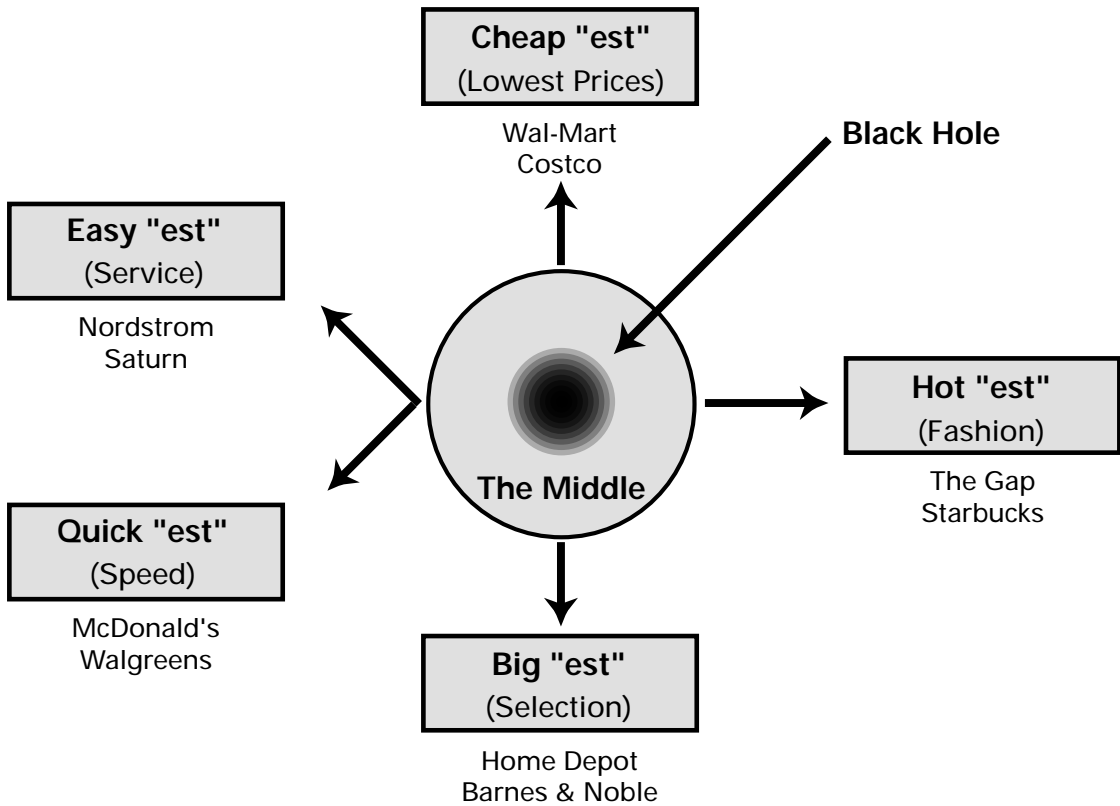
"They just want to find a retailer who has the competence and reliability to consistently provide the product or service in the least amount of total time."

Recognizing the growing importance of satisfying these two different types of customer service needs, we have added a fifth EST dimension. The fifth EST is called "QuickEST," and it is more than a position for winning on the EST model. It is also a dimension that all retailers must address and consider in developing a competitive strategy for their category. In effect, we have divided the original EasyEST (service) dimension into two different EST positions: EasyEST and QuickEST. Figure 1 on the following page shows the new EST model.

The Two New EST Positions: Characteristics and Examples

A number of characteristics define these two new EST positions. EasyEST focuses on

Figure 1: New EST Model



Source: McMillan/Doolittle

“EasyEST retailers create ideas, provide assurance. . .offer an enriching experience, and provide information to help customers understand their options and make decisions easily.”

providing solutions in an efficient manner, and QuickEST on speed. EasyEST retailers create ideas, provide assurance (having what the customers want, in-stock, and providing guarantees and easy return policies), offer an enriching experience, and provide information to help customers understand their options and make decisions easily. They focus on efficiency for the customer through clarity of offer, appropriately edited assortments, well-merchandised and accessorized presentations, and a transparent shopping process. Examples

include Saturn, Nordstrom, Home Depot Expo, Sears' new concept The Great Indoors, The Container Store, Rooms to Go, Publix, L.L. Bean, Peapod, and Streamline.

Saturn is one of the best of the EasyEST retailers. Saturn clearly understands the needs of its target customer—young people, new families, women. It has created a focused product line for the “Saturn family” and developed a consistent and clear message about who Saturn is and what it stands for. Saturn's shopping process removes all the negative barriers traditionally associated with buying cars, particularly the haggling and hassling over price. Its store environment is very comfortable and information rich (e.g., cut-away car, simple comparative information sheets on competitive cars, exceptional return and guarantee policies, etc.). Saturn retailers make it easy and assuring to buy a Saturn automobile.

Figure 3: A Fifth "EST"

	Easy EST (Service)	Quick EST (Speed)
Characteristics	Creates ideas Provides assurance Solves problems Information rich Transparent Knowledgeable employees Efficient process	Location convenient Time convenient Simple process Fast Accurate Organized for people who know what they want
Examples	Saturn Nordstrom Home Depot Expo Container Store Publix Rooms To Go L.L. Bean Peapod Streamline	McDonald's Walgreens Kinko's Auto Zone Blockbuster Mail Boxes Etc. Mobil Speedpass

Source: McMillan|Doolittle

Another good example of an EasyEST retailer is Rooms to Go, the Southeast home furnishings chain that sells furniture solutions with packaged pricing. Its focus is on selling complete sets for each of the major rooms of the home. Simplified pricing, room-like settings, tailored assortments, and easy-to-shop layout all contribute their EasyEST positioning.

Retailers who win at the other new EST position, QuickEST, are location convenient and time convenient, have a simple process, and they are fast to shop, especially at checkout. They are accurate in order handling and fulfillment and are organized for people who know what they want. Examples include McDonald's, Walgreens, Kinko's, Auto Zone, Blockbuster, and Mobil Speedpass.

McDonald's provides a great example of a retailer winning with the QuickEST positioning. Customers don't usually go to McDonald's for creative food. They go there when they want a specific menu item or meal. They go there because there's a location close by. McDonald's stores are designed for fast service. Their menu is simple, and their processes and systems are both fast and accurate in order handling and fulfillment.

Walgreens, with its great information system for handling and filling prescriptions, its large number of convenient locations, and its double drive-up windows for fast order pick-up, and Mobil, with its fast pumps and Speedpass processing system, are also good examples of retailers winning on the QuickEST positioning.

McMillan|Doolittle Photo



Saturn wins with an information-rich store environment that is easy to shop.

Photo courtesy of Walgreen Co.



Walgreens' convenient locations and drive-up windows win on QuickEST positioning.