

Hair O' The Dog Wine & Spirits 2008 Customer Survey Summary

In May 2008, we boldly asked Dogdom to let us know how we've been doing. The results of this anonymous survey, which received more than 200 responses, are summarized below. To read details of all responses, [click here](#). Warning: It's nearly a 50-page document.

Which store do you primarily visit, and why?

Responses were fairly evenly split between “both stores”, Elliott and Marlboro. Convenience was the primarily-mentioned factor, though a number of respondents mentioned that they preferred the staff at one store or the other.

How would you rate our customer service? Do we regularly greet you, offer to assist, and thank you for your business?

We constantly preach to our staff that there are many stores that sell most of the stuff that we sell here at The Dog. The only real difference that we can make is by providing a better environment, and by offering friendly, knowledgeable service. Retail customer service is quirky, as each customer has a unique threshold on the continuum of Too Little/Too Much service. That is, Customer A may want to have someone offer assistance as soon as she walks in the door, while Customer B may find this incredibly annoying, and want to be left alone to browse.

We try very hard to discern from customers' body language whether they may need assistance, and then to offer it gently. We were very pleased that you overwhelmingly appreciated our many efforts here. We quantified the responses on this question into three groups. We grouped responses that included superlatives such as “excellent”, “great”, “outstanding” and “very good” into a category we called Exceptional. We lumped responses that mentioned “good”, or just answered “yes” to the three specific questions we asked into the Satisfactory category. Responses that indicated a generally negative opinion were deemed Unsatisfactory.

We were very pleased to find that **86% of survey respondents deemed our service to be Exceptional**. An additional 13% found it Satisfactory, and just 1% pronounced it Unsatisfactory.

How about our inventory? Do we stock all of the things that you want to buy? Is there anywhere that we should expand our offerings?:

We were a little nervous about this question, particularly because we were asking it right at the end of the slow winter season, when our inventory is typically a bit thinner than usual. While a few folks mentioned this, the overwhelming majority thought that our inventory was perfectly acceptable.

How about our prices? Are they lower, the same, or higher than other Talbot retailers? Any other comments about pricing?:

Retailers hate having pricing discussions with customers, especially in our business. Why? If you're interested, just devote a few minutes to our classic treatise on this subject, [Hazy Late-Night Ruminations on Pricing](#).

Virtually every player in the modern booze trade is a discounter. Discounters offer limited or no service, a small selection, and a shopping environment that can most charitably be described as "utilitarian". They compete with each other primarily on the basis of price, which is why you see those pathetic price posters plastered (alliteration perfecta!) all over their windows.

The Dog differs in that it is a full-service shop. But despite our higher costs for better stores, more selection, and professional staff, we still compete in a market full of discounters. Consequently, we spend a lot of time making sure that our prices are in line with our competitors. We figure that if our prices are roughly the same as what discounters charge, then our overall value is far superior, and that you would need to be a total moron to shop elsewhere.

Further, for the past few months, we have been seeing unprecedented wholesale price increases on many of the items that we sell. Because profit margins in our business are thin, we have no choice but to pass these increases through to consumers. Against this backdrop, we were prepared to get blasted on this question.

So you can imagine that we were very pleased to learn that **84% of our customers said that our prices were lower or about the same** as other local stores. And while 16% said that our prices were a bit higher on certain items, **11% said that our prices were lower**.

Given that our costs are higher than our competitors, and that we provide a better store, better selection, and a better staff, nearly all of you thought that overall, the Dog provided excellent value. That's what we were shooting for.

What is the best thing about Hair O' The Dog? What is the worst thing?

Dogdom consistently cited the excellence of our staff, selection, and store environment as our best attributes, which was gratifying. The Poop was mentioned a number of times as a best thing, which probably has saved us from Mr. Blugman's scary budget axe, so thanks!

On the worst things side, the main complaint was that we didn't have stores in Cambridge, Centreville, Kent Island, Annapolis, Baltimore and Fredericksburg, Virginia. If any reader out there is sitting on a large cash infusion they'd like to invest, we'll get right on all of these locations immediately!

Other Worsts included store hours, which we've recently expanded, and tasting hours, which we're going to expand very soon. Several folks mentioned that our beer wasn't cold enough. Our beer coolers are set at 42 degrees, which we realize is several degrees above freezing.

We believe this to be about right. Why? Because **if your beer doesn't taste good at 42 degrees, you need to be drinking better beer.** This ain't just us talking here. The fine people at RateBeer.com have published [a nice article about beer serving temperatures](#), and here are the beers that they recommend be served at very cold temps:

Very cold (32-39F): Any beer you don't actually want to taste. Pale Lager, Malt Liquor, Canadian-style Golden Ale and Cream Ale, Low Alcohol, Canadian, American or Scandinavian-style Cider.

Our coolers are set right in the middle of the recommended range for lighter-bodied beers. The general guideline is the same as with wine. The fuller-bodied the beer, the warmer it should be served, between 42 degrees for lighter beers and 55 degrees for the heavier beers that we sell.

If you were us, what would you do to improve our stores?:

We received a lot of suggestions, some a lot more feasible than others. Dogdom asked for more selection, expanded tasting hours, and even more descriptive signage. We're happy to say that we're working on all of these, and you'll see the results shortly. We have recently expanded our signage in the beer section, and we're now turning our attention to spirits.