

Management assistants for e-commerce – a new training occupation from 1 August 2018

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With the boom in the online trading of goods and services, the significance and scope of e-commerce is growing across all industries. New areas of activity and new organisational and business models are emerging. To meet the growing need for skilled workers in e-commerce a new commercial occupation has been created. The article highlights the background to the revision of the training regulations and describes the occupational profile.

Varied aspects of e-commerce

The online trading of goods and services is booming. As a sales channel, e-commerce is used not only by wholesale and foreign trade, and by retail and the tourism industry, but also by manufacturers and service providers. In addition to purchasing and sales processes, it also embraces services provided within the customer service and online banking sector. It focuses on electronic business transactions taking place between a company and a private individual or end customer (business-to-consumer) or between two companies (business-to-business). Internet trading is not only conducted by large mail-order companies but also increasingly by stationary retail to accommodate changing consumer behaviour and to open up further sales channels. Additional digital sales channels can be used for customer-base visibility and to ensure you are not overlooked in their purchasing decision – as they search for products and compare prices. Retailers and multichannel traders therefore require qualified personnel. Furthermore, over the course of advancing digitalisation, increasing numbers of start-up companies are exploiting the ongoing transformation in sales channels and structures because it gives them the opportunity of operating, for example, without renting a premises or warehouse and, as a result, with much reduced business risk.

Organisation and use of new sales channels

In terms of the customer, the entire process from building awareness on the internet, to presentation of the offer and customer-specific information through to the overall presentation of the shopping basket and exchange of services (goods in return for payment) is significantly different in the virtual environment compared to stationary retail. The use of digital sales channels requires the creation of a website which needs to be run from a technical perspective, populated with content and designed in a user-friendly manner. And here, where there is an absence of personal contact, the product range, advice and marketing of other solutions need to be presented as per the “analogue business”; and methods of payment and distribution channels also need to be designed specifically for the customer.

Revision process

When the training occupation of management assistant for retail services was revised – this entered into force in 2017 – an elective qualification “online trading” was introduced. A period of 13 weeks was included for this as part of the training. This was not able to accommodate the wide-ranging and specific needs of e-commerce beyond the immediate context of retailing. The numerous interfaces with other occupations such as retail service management assistants, wholesale and foreign trade management assistants, media agents for digital and print media and dialogue marketing services managers meant that a stand-alone, cross-sector occupation was necessary.

For this reason, the creation of a new training occupation was suggested as early as 2015 (cf. MALCHER 2015) on the initiative of the Handelsverband Deutschland [German Retail Association]. The restructuring process, including the development of the framework curriculum for vocational schools, was completed at the end of May 2017. This has meant that implementation in practice can begin as early

as possible and that companies and schools are being given time to prepare for the new occupation before it enters into force on 1 August 2018 (cf. BGBl. I 2017 No. 78, p. 3926). The social partners and industries involved in the process, which are represented by experts from retail, wholesale and foreign trade companies, service companies and logistics and tourism, have agreed on a mono-occupation – i.e. an occupation without specialisms – which is appropriate and acceptable to all those involved despite differing and, in some case, sector-specific requirements. This has resulted in a high degree of flexibility – extending beyond sector boundaries – for future skilled workers and for companies when recruiting both the next generation and skilled workers. The examination regulations follow the extended final examination model. In the first part of the final examination model, following one half of the duration of training, there will be a written exam on the first 15 months of the training content in the areas of product range management and contract initiation. The result will comprise 25 per cent of the overall grade. The second part of the examination then covers the areas of business processes, customer communication, economics and social studies as well as an oral examination on a project related process in e-commerce.

What distinguishes the new occupational profile?

Management assistant for e-commerce is the first new commercial occupation for more than ten years. It specifically offers commercial qualifications focused on digital business models. It opens up the opportunity to systematically introduce trainees to the new requirements associated with digitalisation and changed consumer behaviour. Management assistants for e-commerce also learn to manage the changing sales channels and structures of e-commerce. The profile of skills and competencies includes the following:

- Design and ongoing development of ranges of goods and services
- Evaluation, utilisation and ongoing development of e-commerce sales channels
- Management of online portals and online shops, and provision of support to procurement
- Use of tools for commercial management and monitoring in e-commerce
- Creation of interfaces with other sales channels
- Evaluation and selection of communication channels
- Organisation of internal and external communication
- Preparation and implementation of online marketing measures
- Initiation and processing of contracts for online goods and services
- Evaluation and use of different payment systems
- Compliance with legal regulations for e-commerce
- Application of project-oriented working methods in e-commerce

Future trainees should be able to recognise and understand the importance of new digital developments for their own area of work and implement these accordingly. An affinity for media is helpful as is an interest in addressing the developments in online selling and in distribution channels. In particular, this requires a willingness to understand changes as productive challenges and to actively develop solution concepts.

Outlook

Between now and when the regulation enters into force, experts, industry associations and unions involved are promoting the new training occupation at numerous events in Chambers and companies. An implementation aid was published in the BIBB series “Ausbildung gestalten” [Structuring training] (www.bibb.de/de/berufeinfo.php/profile/apprenticeship/261016) to support training practitioners. The social partners intend to develop an advanced vocational training regulation to establish ongoing career opportunities for management assistants for e-commerce following completion of their training.

In light of the rapid development within online trading, the BIBB believes it makes sense to monitor the development of this new occupation with regard to the potential need for change or adaptation. ◀

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Literature

MALCHER, W.: E-Commerce schafft Qualifikationsbedarf im Einzelhandel – Vorschlag des HDE für neue Aus- und Fortbildungsberufe. In: BWP 44 (2015) 6, p. 44–45