



**Auditory Experience Will  
Shape The Future Of Retail.**

*\*Perspective developed by*  
**akoio**® **chute**  
GERDEMAN





# Auditory Experience Will Shape The Future Of Retail

————— \*Perspective developed by  
ASG / Chute Gerdeman + Akoio\*

Sensorial experiences are often overlooked, taken for granted, or accounted for way too late in the process.

Every detail matters, from aesthetic to scent **and sound**.

Our research showcases a great opportunity for brands to build a better experience and relationship with their guests, while maintaining a sustainable and enjoyable workplace for their employees.

When it comes to auditory health, it's critical for brands to be ahead of the game. When ignored, brands can expect consequences to their talent retention, and to their *bottom line*.

# Our Perspectives

Meet the team of leading experts that made this perspective possible.



*Bill Schiffmiller*  
Founder  
**akoio**



*Michael Piskosz*  
Audiologist /  
Director of Research  
& Client Relations  
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GERDEMAN



*Maxwell Miller*  
Brand Strategy



*Ken O'Connell*  
Partner,  
Strategic Partnerships



*Steve Morris*  
Founder, ASG



quick question...

**Do you ever consider  
auditory health, and how it  
*can impact your business?***

**Once a store is operating,  
noise is a top concern for  
shoppers & staff.**

# Your guests want to be proactive, but don't know *where to start*.

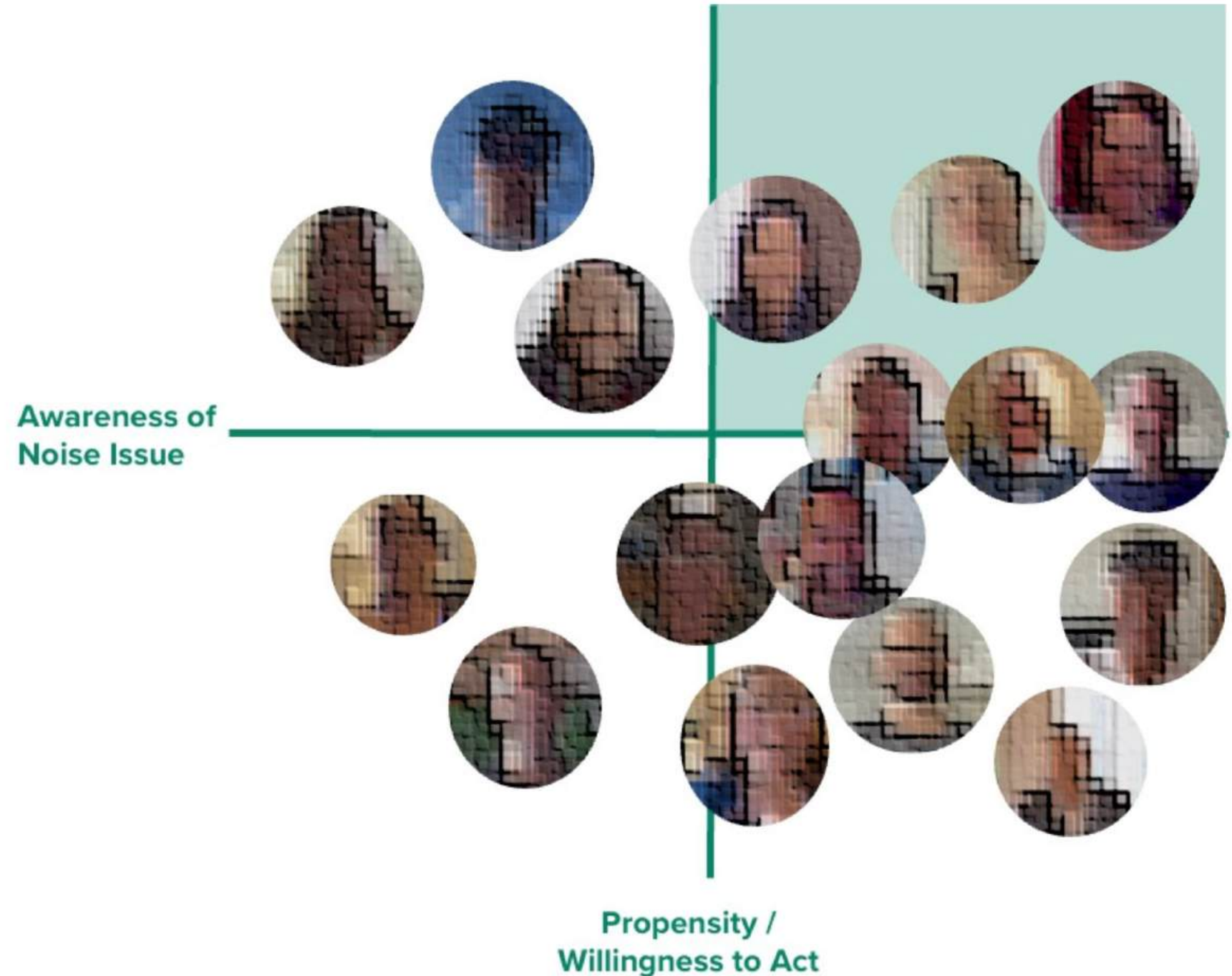
60%

More aware of sound health  
in the last year.\*

33%

Akoio subjects willing to act  
on sound health.\*

\* Akoio Voice of the Customer  
research, 2023, n= 30



Fact -

**80 decibels** is the threshold  
where prolonged exposure  
can cause *hearing loss*.

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most concerts are over

and to hold brands accountable...

**We audited 20+ stores  
to see if brand environments  
were *auditorily considerate*.**



# Store Audits *(peak decibel levels)*

## Louis Vuitton

71dB

65 dB on average

LV was accessibility at its best. Multiple languages were spoken in-store ranging from Chinese, English, and Spanish. Their personal consultations led to clear conversations.

## Restoration Hardware

81dB

70dB on average

Much of the auditory experience changes as you navigate from their retail showroom to their restaurant, where the audio levels changed drastically.

## Chanel

70dB

64dB on average

Very light music that was on brand.

Conversations were easy and no noticeable communications / auditory issues were present.

## Apple

82dB

77 dB on average

Difficulty conversing with associates as music was loud and conversations were prominent.

There was additional audio interference from devices, language barriers and more.

# Store Audits *(peak decibel levels)*

## Aritzia

93dB

82dB on average

Communication and conversations were difficult. The music and auditory experience in general was dangerous for Aritzia shoppers and staff.

## lululemon

71dB

65dB on average

Overall the experience was comfortable, no noticeable remarks.

## Abercrombie

82dB

77dB on average

The added control of fitting room lighting and music levels were a nice accessibility touch.

Much of the loudness in-store stemmed from foot traffic and conversations happening in the moment.

## Freebird

84dB

80dB on average

The auditory experience overall was a struggle. Conversations were difficult, and the music levels were too high for sustained listening.



# Store Audits *(peak decibel levels)*

## Akira

86dB

80dB on average

In general, this space was too loud, primarily from the music in-store.

## Sephora

82dB

77dB on average

Sephora was difficult. There was interference from loud music, conversations and foot traffic. Associates were talking over one another and guests. Sensorially speaking, this was an overwhelming experience.

## Hollister

71dB

65dB on average

Overall the experience was comfortable, but we did notice the metal hangars contacting the clothing racks frequently.

Something to keep an eye on.

## Express

72dB

65dB on average

Comfortable experience overall, with attentive associates and a relaxing atmosphere.

# Store Audits *(peak decibel levels)*

## H&M

71dB

66dB on average

Overall the experience was comfortable. No noticeable remarks.

## JD Sports

80dB

72dB on average

Overall the experience was comfortable. Music was a little loud in certain parts of the store, but it did not sustain.

## Starbucks

82dB

77dB on average

With machines grinding product, orders being shouted, and many conversations happening all at once, Starbucks is a difficult case study for auditory accessibility.

## Zumiez

70dB

64dB on average

Overall the experience was comfortable. Music was on brand, energetic and paid homage to skate culture.



# Store Audits *(peak decibel levels)*

## Victoria's Secret

72dB

66dB on average

In parts of the space, the store was almost too quiet, eerily so. For this brand and the energy they embody, it's important to get that right.

## Zara

75dB

65dB on average

Overall the experience was comfortable, but the music in this space felt out of place.

## LEGO

78dB

74dB on average

Much of the sound in this space revolved around the lego toys themselves, and the guests playing in the moment. While somewhat inescapable, it's an important factor to consider going forward for LEGO.

## Aerie

75dB

70dB on average

Tons of foot traffic, and a successful, popular experience. Audio levels were right in the sweet spot.

# Perspectives We Heard Along The Way:

*"I often leave work with a hoarse voice from **talking over customers and staff**. I used to really dislike it, but now I guess my body is used to it."*

**- Anonymous Apple Employee**

*"When I worked at Aerie, I couldn't stand hearing the same music all-the-time."*

*It was really **tiring and mind-numbing**."*

**- Anonymous Ohio State Fashion Retail Student**

*"I get **the worst headaches here**. Between the music, the loudness of the customers, the ear piece we wear and the smell of fragrances all day, my body can't take it sometimes."*

*Sometimes I have to leave the mall and reset."*

**- Anonymous Retail Manager**

*"We **hardly have issues audio-wise**. Our one-on-one conversationalist approach helps us satisfy our guests and provide great service."*

*If I encounter issues, it's when a rush occurs on a weekend, because then our consultations get sped up and our environment is chaotic."*

**- Anonymous Client Advisor, Louis Vuitton**



Here are *three key takeaways* that every retailer should be paying attention to.



## Key Takeaways

# Auditory interference *is everywhere.*

Auditory interference operates in many different functions. It could be a barista yelling an order, crowd noise at a food court, or something as simple as an in-store conversation.

Interference is inevitable. It's imperative for brands to recognize the areas where staff and shoppers may run into auditory interference, so they can build a better experience that factors it in ahead of time.

Examples of interference:

Chatter - Music - Machinery - Surface Reflections -  
Foot Traffic - Technology - Shared Spaces - No Audio Buffers

Many students within The Ohio State University's Fashion Retail Studies program cite loud environments as a **major deterrent to productivity, workplace enjoyment, and customer success.**\*

\* Ohio State Fashion Retail Studies, ASGCG Research



# Auditory Considerations

## Be considerate of *in-store conversations.*

On our store tours, associates struggled, customers struggled, and we struggled to *actively listen* in spaces.

There were evident issues with in-store communications, and communication is critical to good service and a good experience.

**A significant 82% of shopping decisions are made while customers are physically present in the store, emphasizing the critical impact of in-store dialogue on purchasing choices.\***

\* Mass Merchant Shopper Engagement Study conducted by the Point of Purchase Advertising International (POPAI)



# Auditory Considerations



## Auditory fatigue *is real.*

In just 90 minutes of shopping, our energy levels, moods and mental capacity to process and shop intently were severely diminished.

It only takes **80dB to cause hearing loss** over time and for employees, as well as shoppers who spend frequent amounts of time in-store, it's imperative to find a sustainable, healthy solution to this issue.

Decibel levels don't tell the whole story. Fluctuating environments, overstimulating noisy spaces, and hours of shopping activity impose a direct correlation to mood, energy levels, and mental exhaustion.

# Bill's Takes:

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*“A decibel reading is a common assumption. We shouldn’t assume.”*

Retailers are simply not doing enough for their employees and guests in their spaces. Just because your store meets compliance, doesn’t mean it captures the auditory issues your space poses. It simply satisfies the bare minimum.

It’s about capturing the big picture, understanding accessibility and auditory experience in its entirety and how you can optimize it for your guests and your staff.

Noise overstimulation contributes to health factors like **high blood pressure, fatigue, anxiety, depression, and stress.**

Developing auditory experience starts at the beginning, it can’t be an afterthought.



*Bill Schiffmiller*  
Founder  
**akoio**



# Statistics You Need to Know

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2,500,000,000

people will require auditory services — **double today's numbers**, by 2050 or sooner. \*

20%

Only 20% of the global population is addressed by **current auditory health** models that focus on late-life hearing loss, dismissing the everyday needs of an average person. \*

68%

of working Americans say they would consider workplace noise levels when making **employment decisions**. \*

\* WHO (World Health Organization) Deafness and hearing loss report

\* Quiet Mark USA, National Noise Report, January 2022

# 4 Key Impacts of Noise in Retail

Here are key ways your auditory experience can help, or hurt others.

## 1 *Mood*

Excessive noise increases stress, anxiety, and irritability, and over time can contribute to changes in mood.

In contrast, pleasant sound environments can promote relaxation and happiness.

## 2 *Engagement*

Optimal auditory environments boost employee engagement, loyalty, and job satisfaction.

When companies prioritize auditory wellness, it strengthens connection in the workplace between employees & guests.

## 3 *Productivity*

Disruptive or irregular noise interferes with focus, memory, and decision-making, leading to reduced task performance.

Managed auditory environments help boost concentration and efficiency.

## 4 *Health*

Poor acoustic environments can lead to hearing damage, stress, and even cardiovascular issues.

Investing in auditory wellness and acoustic design improves both health and performance.

# Some Retail Considerations:

Here are 3 ways that brands can get ahead of the issue, instead of propelling it.

## 1 *Minimize Disruptive Noise*

Implement strategies to reduce harsh, irregular noise, especially in open or shared environments.

**According to the CDC, 9% of retail workers report experiencing hearing difficulty. \***

If the store they work in is unsafe and constantly disruptive, it will continue to have a direct impact on productivity, communications, sales and overall customer morale.

## 2 *Foster Sound Wellness*

Reassess auditory environments regularly to ensure they support well-being. Your environment is your brand promise, so it's important to develop a space that people will remember and actively strive to participate.

Brands can **combat auditory fatigue** with sound wellness by:

- Allow for quiet zones or scheduled noise breaks where employees can recover from constant sound exposure.
- Being proactive in identifying sound stressors before they lead to burnout or fatigue.

## 3 *Build For Better Communications*

Design spaces that support clear, effective verbal communication without excessive background interference.

Tailor communication tools and spaces for both quiet focus and collaboration.

This can make your employee and your guest's experience easier, leading to a quicker path to purchase.

Retail employees can improve customer satisfaction by **up to 50%**, fostering a positive shopping environment. \*

\* CDC Wholesale and Retail Trade (WRT) Statistics

\* Aiscreen.io - The Influence of Employee Happiness on Customer Experiences in the Retail Industry

# An Opportunity:

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Noise affects each and every one of us, and **we are hardly talking about it.**

Your brand has the opportunity to craft an experience that prioritizes auditory health, fosters a comfortable environment for your employees and entices shoppers to stay a while. I've been in the design world for years now, and as an avid lover of all things retail, restaurant and experience, **we need to do better.**

Like many, I struggle with a hearing deficiency myself. Our visits made it even more evident just how tiring shopping and retail can be. It's also clear just how many brands aren't thinking about their auditory experience. There are many like me and they aren't even aware of it, but *they feel it.*

We can't shut noise off. It's constant and it's on brands to make every experience accessible for shoppers and staff. The studies show the direct correlation between auditory fatigue and an uptick in issues with customer service, mood, physical health, reduced productivity and other issues.

*Get ahead of it, be the trailblazer and build a better auditory experience.*



***Max Miller***  
Manager, Marketing  
+ Brand Strategy

**chute**  
GERDEMAN



# Let's do better, *together*.

**Our team of experts is more than qualified to help you develop an experience that prioritizes the health, wellness and satisfaction for your guests.**

*Let's get to work.*

## CONTACTS

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