

Counter and Rental Clerks

(0*NET 41-2021.00)

Significant Points

- Jobs are primarily entry-level and require little or no experience and minimal formal education.
- Faster-than-average employment growth is expected as businesses strive to improve customer service.
- Part-time employment opportunities should be plentiful.

Nature of the Work

Whether renting videotapes, air compressors, or moving vans, or dropping off clothes to be drycleaned or appliances to be serviced, we rely on counter and rental clerks to handle these transactions efficiently. Although the specific duties of these workers vary by establishment, counter and rental clerks answer questions involving product availability, cost, and rental provisions. Counter and rental clerks also take orders, calculate fees, receive payments, and accept returned merchandise. (Cashiers and retail salespersons, two occupations with similar duties, are discussed elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

Regardless of where they work, counter and rental clerks must be knowledgeable about the company's services, policies, and procedures. Depending on the type of establishment, counter and rental clerks use their special knowledge to give advice on a wide variety of products and services, ranging from hydraulic tools to shoe repair. For example, in the car rental industry, these workers inform customers about the features of different types of automobiles, as well as daily and weekly rental costs. They also ensure that customers meet age and other requirements for renting cars, and they indicate when and in what condition the cars must be returned. Those in the equipment rental industry have similar duties, but must also know how to operate and care for the machinery rented. In drycleaning establishments, counter clerks inform customers when items will be ready and what the effects, if any, of the chemicals used on garments are. In video rental stores, counter clerks advise customers about the use of video and game players and the length of a rental, scan returned movies and games, restock shelves, handle money, and log daily reports.

When taking orders, counter and rental clerks use various types of equipment. In some establishments, they write out tickets and order forms, although most use computers or bar-code scanners. Most of these computer systems are user friendly, require very little data entry, and are customized for the firm. Scanners read the product code and display a description of the item on a computer screen. However, clerks must ensure that the data on the screen pertain to the product.

Working Conditions

Firms employing counter and rental clerks usually operate nights and weekends for the convenience of their customers. However, many employers offer flexible schedules. Some counter and rental clerks work 40-hour weeks, but about half are on part-time schedules—usually during rush periods, such as weekends, evenings, and holidays.

Working conditions usually are pleasant; most stores and service establishments are clean, well lighted, and temperature controlled. However, clerks are on their feet much of the time and may be confined behind a small counter area or be exposed to harmful

chemicals. The job requires constant interaction with the public and can be stressful, especially during busy periods.

Employment

Counter and rental clerks held 436,000 jobs in 2002. About 21 percent of clerks worked in consumer goods rental, which includes video rental stores. Other large employers included drycleaning and laundry services; automotive equipment rental and leasing services; automobile dealers; amusement, gambling, and recreation industries; and grocery stores.

Counter and rental clerks are employed throughout the country, but are concentrated in metropolitan areas, where personal services and renting and leasing services are in greater demand.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Counter and rental clerk jobs are primarily at the entry level and require little or no experience and minimal formal education. However, many employers prefer workers with at least a high school diploma.

In most companies, counter and rental clerks are trained on the job, sometimes through the use of videotapes, brochures, and pamphlets. Clerks usually learn how to operate a firm's equipment and become familiar with the firm's policies and procedures under the observation of a more experienced worker. However, some employers have formal classroom training programs lasting from a few



Counter and rental clerks must be knowledgeable about the products and services that their firm provides.

hours to a few weeks. Topics covered in this training include the nature of the industry, the company and its policies and procedures, operation of equipment, sales techniques, and customer service. Counter and rental clerks also must become familiar with the different products and services rented or provided by their company in order to give customers the best possible service.

Counter and rental clerks should enjoy working with people and should have the ability to deal tactfully with difficult customers. They also should be able to handle several tasks at once, while continuing to provide friendly service. In addition, good oral and written communication skills are essential.

Advancement opportunities depend on the size and type of company. Many establishments that employ counter or rental clerks tend to be small businesses, making advancement difficult. But in larger establishments with a corporate structure, jobs such as counter and rental clerks offer good opportunities for workers to learn about their company's products and business practices. These jobs can lead to more responsible positions. It is common in many establishments to promote counter and rental clerks to event planner, assistant manager, or salesperson. Workers may choose to pursue related positions, such as mechanic, or even establish their own business.

In certain industries, such as equipment repair, counter and rental jobs may be an additional or alternative source of income for workers who are unemployed or semiretired. For example, retired mechanics could prove invaluable at tool rental centers because of their knowledge of, and familiarity with, tools.

Job Outlook

Employment of counter and rental clerks is expected to increase about faster than the average for all occupations through the year 2012, as all types of businesses strive to improve customer service by hiring more clerks. In addition, some industries employing counter and rental clerks—for example, rental and leasing services and amusement and recreation industries—are expected to grow rapidly. Nevertheless, most job openings will arise from the need to replace experienced workers who transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force. Part-time employment opportunities are expected to be plentiful.

Earnings

Counter and rental clerks typically start at the minimum wage, which, in establishments covered by Federal law, was \$5.15 an hour in 2003. In some States, the law sets the minimum wage higher, and establishments must pay at least that amount. Wages also tend to be higher in areas where there is intense competition for workers. In addition to wages, some counter and rental clerks receive commissions, based on the number of contracts they complete or services they sell.

Median hourly earnings of counter and rental clerks in 2002 were \$8.31. The middle 50 percent earned between \$6.89 and \$10.91 an hour. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$6.03 an hour, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$15.10 an hour. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest number of counter and rental clerks in 2002 were as follows:

Automobile dealers	\$16.09
Automotive equipment rental and leasing	9.69
Lessors of real estate	9.19
Drycleaning and laundry services	7.34
Amusement and recreation services	7.30

Full-time workers typically receive health and life insurance, paid vacation, and sick leave. Benefits for counter and rental clerks

who work part time or for independent stores tend to be significantly less than for those who work full time. Many companies offer discounts to both full-time and part-time employees on the services they provide.

Related Occupations

Counter and rental clerks take orders and receive payment for services rendered. Other workers with similar duties include tellers, cashiers, food- and beverage-serving and related workers, gaming cage workers, Postal Service workers, and retail salespersons.

Sources of Additional Information

For general information on employment in the equipment rental industry, contact

► American Rental Association, 1900 19th St., Moline, IL 61265. Internet: <http://www.ararental.org>

For more information about the work of counter clerks in drycleaning and laundry establishments, contact:

► International Fabricare Institute, 12251 Tech Rd., Silver Spring, MD 20904. Internet: <http://www.iff.org>