



## Retail Trade Statistics

### Introduction

The Retail Trade sector is comprised of establishments engaged in retailing merchandise, generally without transformation, and rendering services incidental to the sale of merchandise. The U.S. Census Bureau has collected retail trade statistics for the United States in periodic censuses since 1930, and in various surveys from 1935 to the present. The agency began collecting data for Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico in 1939. Data collection for Guam and the Virgin Islands of the United States began in 1958, and the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands in 1982.

Title 13, United States Code-Census, authorizes the economic census and makes response to its inquiries mandatory. Periodic surveys are taken under the same authority; however, response to surveys conducted more frequently than once a year is voluntary. All data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau are confidential and are presented in summary form only. There are heavy penalties for violating the law's confidentiality provisions.

### Who Uses Retail Trade Data

Retail statistics are essential to understanding the Nation's economy and making projections for the future. These data are of concern to Federal, state, and local governments, and also are used by manufacturers, importers,

and distributors in gauging potential markets, forecasting and analyzing sales, laying out distribution territories, allocating advertising, and planning new plants, warehouses, or other outlets. Trade organizations, market researchers, and chambers of commerce use the information in studying trends and local needs. Finally, each business engaged in retail trade has the opportunity to compare its own operation with other activity in the area or the kind of merchandise it sells.

### The North American Industry Classification System (NAICS)

The U.S. Census Bureau used the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) for the 1997 Economic Census, except for the Outlying Areas which used the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) coding system (upon request of the Outlying Areas' governments). Retail trade industries are identified as NAICS sector 44-45. Much of the Retail Trade sector remained unchanged following the conversion from the SIC coding system to the NAICS. Notable changes following the implementation of NAICS include the exclusion of eating and drinking places and mobile foodservices (which are now in the Accommodation and Foodservices sector), pawn shops (which are now in the Finance and Insurance sector), and bakeries (which are now in the Manufacturing sector). In addition, the Retail Trade sector now includes

industries that were previously classified in wholesale trade that operate facilities open to the general public. Examples of such establishments include automotive supplies dealers, computer and peripheral equipment merchants, office supplies dealers, farm supplies dealers, and building materials dealers.

The Retail Trade sector is comprised of two main types of retailers—store and nonstore retailers.

Store retailers operate fixed point-of-sale locations, located and designed to attract a high volume of walk-in customers. In general, retail stores have extensive displays of merchandise and use mass-media advertising to attract customers. They typically sell merchandise to the general public for personal or household consumption, but some also serve business and institutional clients. In addition to retailing merchandise, some store retailers also are engaged in the provision of after-sales services, such as repair and installation.

Nonstore retailers, like store retailers, are organized to serve the general public; however, this retail subsector reaches customers and markets merchandise with methods, such as the broadcasting of "infomercials," the broadcasting and publication of direct-response advertising, the publication of paper and electronic catalogs, door-to-door solicitation, in-home demonstrations, selling from portable

stalls (street vendors, except food), and distribution through vending machines. Establishments engaged in the direct sale of products, such as home heating oil dealers and home delivery newspaper routes, also are classified as nonstore retailers.

Excluded from this sector are governmental organizations classified in the covered industries, except for liquor stores operated by state and local governments. Data for direct sellers with no paid employees and post exchanges, ship stores, and similar establishments operated on military posts by agencies of the Federal Government are not included. The basic tabulations in this report do not include data for establishments that are auxiliary (primary function is providing a service, such as warehouses) to retail establishments within the same organization.

In general, retail establishments are classified by kind of business according to the principal lines of commodities they sell (groceries, hardware, etc.), or the usual trade designations (drug store, cigar store, etc.). There are 12 major NAICS industry groups in retail trade

- 441 Motor Vehicle and Parts Dealers
- 442 Furniture and Home Furnishings Stores
- 443 Electronics and Appliance Stores

- 444 Building Material and Garden Equipment and Supplies Dealers
- 445 Food and Beverage Stores
- 446 Health and Personal Care Stores
- 447 Gasoline Stations
- 448 Clothing and Clothing Accessories Stores
- 451 Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book, and Music Stores
- 452 General Merchandise Stores
- 453 Miscellaneous Store Retailers
- 454 Nonstore Retailers

### What Data Are Available

The U.S. Census Bureau conducts monthly and annual retail trade surveys to obtain more current data than can be provided by the economic census. These surveys consist of a sample of firms with employees identified in the census, supplemented with samples of “births” (newly created firms) and nonemployers (nonemployers and recent “births” are identified using administrative records). Most of the survey data are obtained by mail and data collection is concentrated on a much narrower set of data items than the census.

The following are highlights of the publications associated with the U.S. Census Bureau’s retail trade surveys:

- *Annual Retail Trade: The Annual Benchmark Report for Retail Trade.* This series is published in print and

PDF format several months after the close of the calendar year. It includes estimates of annual sales, per capita sales, gross margins, monthly and year-end inventories, inventory/sales ratios, merchandise purchased, gross margin/sales ratios, and accounts receivable balances for the United States by kind of business. Comparable statistics are shown for the previous year, along with year-to-year percentage changes. Monthly data (both seasonally adjusted and unadjusted) also are presented for the most recent 10 years.

Kind-of-business groups are based on the SIC through the publication of 1998 data. NAICS-based categories are reported for 1998 and 1999 in the 1999 report.

- *Monthly Retail Trade: Sales and Inventories.* Released approximately 6 weeks after the close of the reference month, this monthly report includes sales estimates, summarized by major kind-of-business groups for the United States. Reports show preliminary figures for the current month and final figures for months earlier in the reference year. National estimates of end-of-month inventories and inventory/sales ratios also are presented. Both unadjusted figures and data adjusted for seasonal variation are included.

Kind-of-business groups are based on the SIC through 2000. NAICS-based categories will be reported starting in 2001.

- *Advance Monthly Retail Sales.* Released approximately 9 days after the close of each month, this report contains monthly retail sales and trends by kind-of-business groups at the national level. The figures are based on a subsample of the U.S. Census Bureau's retail trade survey sample. The series provides the following: advance estimates for the current month, preliminary or final estimates for the 2 preceding months, and final estimates for the same 2 months, a year earlier. Both unadjusted figures and data adjusted for seasonal variation are included.

Kind-of-business groups are based on the SIC through 2000. NAICS-based categories will be reported starting in 2001.

## Censuses

The economic census, which occurs for years ending in "2" and "7," enumerates all business establishments in the United States and Outlying Areas (Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands of the United States, and the Commonwealth of the

Northern Mariana Islands). Data collected in the economic census include geographic location, business activity, legal form of organization, dollar volume of sales, annual and first-quarter payroll, and number of employees. For the 1997 Economic Census, data for retail stores were gathered through a combination of questionnaires (sent to all but the smallest firms) and the administrative records of other Federal Government agencies. There were 33 variants of the census questionnaire, permitting each establishment to answer in terms of categories relevant to its operations. Questionnaires were mailed to all firms above a certain size cutoff and to a sample of smaller firms with paid employees. Information from nonemployers and small firms, not in the sample, were obtained from Federal Government administrative records.

Data collected in the 1997 Economic Census were published in the following economy-wide reports between 1999 and 2000:

- *Core Business Statistics*
  - *Advance Report.* This report contains the first data ever published on a NAICS basis and contains national data at the sector and subsector levels. The NAICS table is limited to 1997

data, but a separate, SIC code-based table shows 1992 and 1997 figures at the two-digit SIC level, which permits calculation of percentage change in establishments, payroll, sales, or employment over the 5-year period.

- *Comparative Statistics.* This report supersedes the Advance Report. It presents two-, three-, and selected four-, five-, and six-digit SIC summaries at the national level and two- and three-digit SIC and selected four-digit SIC data at the state level.
- *Bridge Between NAICS and SIC.* This presents 1997 data cross-tabulated by the old and new classification systems.
- *Nonemployer Statistics.* This report summarizes the number of establishments and sales and receipts of companies with no paid employees.
- *Company Statistics including Minority- and Women-Owned Businesses.* This report includes data by industrial classification, geographic area (states, metropolitan areas, counties, and places), size of firm (employment and receipts), and legal form of organization (individual proprietorships, partnerships, and corporations), for all companies (businesses) and for businesses owned by Blacks; Hispanics; Asians

and Pacific Islanders; American Indians and Alaska Natives; and Women.

- *Business Expenses.* This report shows operating expenses data at the national level for SIC-based merchant wholesale trade, retail trade, service industries, and auxiliary establishments of manufactures, mineral industries, and construction industries.

The following data from the 1997 Economic Census for the Retail Trade sector are published for the Nation, each state, and the District of Columbia:

- *Geographic Area Series.* Separate reports are published for each state, the District of Columbia, and the United States as a whole. These reports present data on the number of establishments, sales, annual and first-quarter payroll, and number of employees on a NAICS basis.
- *Subject Series.*
  - *Merchandise Lines Sales.* This report presents data on major categories of merchandise sold for establishments with payroll by kind of business on a NAICS basis. Only national data are available in viewable PDF reports. Internet and CD-ROM databases contain national data, and data for states, for metropolitan

statistical areas (MSAs), and for the area within each state outside any MSA.

- *Establishment and Firm Size (Including Legal Form of Organization).* This report presents data on sales, payroll, and employment on a NAICS basis for the United States by sales size, by employment size, and by legal form of organization for establishments; and by sales size (including concentration by largest firms), by employment size, and by number of establishments operated (single- and multiestablishments) for firms.
- *Miscellaneous Subjects.* This report presents data, for the Nation as a whole and for states, on floor space in general merchandise stores and food stores, and on class of customer for all retailers.
- *Summary.* After the publication of all area and subject reports for retail trade, a single volume is published summarizing the most widely used statistics from all of the previously issued retail trade reports. This report will be issued in printed format.
- *ZIP Code Statistics.* This report presents data on the number of establishments, the number of full-year establishments, and the number of part-year establishments by kind of business and ZIP Code for sales

and employment size on a NAICS basis. Also included are data on the number of establishments, sales, payroll, and employment for the Retail Trade sector total by ZIP Codes on a NAICS basis. This report will be available in Internet and CD-ROM databases.

- *Economic Census of the Outlying Areas: Construction, Manufacturing, Wholesale, Retail, and Service Industries.*
- *Puerto Rico.* Retail data for Puerto Rico are published in the following two reports:
  - *Geographic Area Statistics.* This report contains general statistics for industry groups by the municipio and commercial region level.
  - *Subject Series.* This report contains data on commodity line sales by kind of business, and merchandise line sales by kind of business.
- *Virgin Islands of the United States.* This report presents data by kind of business for construction industries, manufactures, retail trade, wholesale trade, and service industries. In addition to data for the Virgin Islands as a whole, data are presented for St. Thomas and St. John (combined to prevent disclosure problems), St. Croix

and the towns of Charlotte Amalie, Christiansted, and Frederiksted.

- *Guam*. This report presents data by kind of business for construction industries, manufacturing, retail trade, wholesale trade, and service industries. Tables present data for Guam and its election districts.
- *Northern Mariana Islands*. This report presents data by kind of business for construction industries, manufacturing, retail trade, wholesale trade, and service industries. Tables present data for the Northern Mariana Islands and the four municipalities.

### Other Economic and Demographic Census and Survey Reports

- *County Business Patterns*. This is an annual series that covers most of the Nation's economic activity. Data are provided for the following NAICS economic sectors: forestry, fishing, hunting, and agriculture support; mining; utilities; construction; manufacturing; wholesale trade; retail trade; transportation and warehousing; information; finance and insurance; real estate and rental and leasing; professional, scientific, and technical services; management of companies and enterprises; administrative and support and waste management and remediation services; education services; health care and social assistance; arts, entertainment, and recreation; accommodation and foodservices; and other services (except public administration). The series is useful for studying the economic activity of small areas; analyzing economic changes over time; and as a benchmark for statistical series, surveys, and databases between economic censuses. The series serves various business uses, such as analyzing market potential, measuring the effectiveness of sales and advertising programs, setting sales quotas, and developing budgets. The data also are used by government agencies for administration and planning.
- *Quarterly Financial Report*. This series presents up-to-date aggregate statistics on the financial position of U.S. corporations. Based upon an extensive sample survey, the report presents estimated statements of income and retained earnings, balance sheets, and related financial and operating ratios for the domestic operations of all manufacturing corporations with assets over \$250,000, and corporations in the mining and trade areas with assets over \$50 million. Data are classified by industry and by asset size.

### Other Aids and Sources of Data

- More information about the scope, coverage, classification system, data items, and publications for each of the economic censuses and related surveys are published in the *Guide to the 1997 Economic Census and Related Statistics* (<http://www.census.gov/epcd/www/guide.html>); The *Statistical Abstract of the United States*; the periodic *County and City Data Book* (latest, 1994), *State and Metropolitan Area Data Book* (latest, 1998), *Historical Statistics of the United States From Colonial Times to 1970* (available from the Government Printing Office, out-of-print commercially), and *County and State Profiles* (latest, 1997). Census and survey data also appear in trade journals, textbooks, and other secondary sources. Additional information on the methodology, procedures, and history of the economic censuses is published in the *History of the 1997 Economic Census* (<http://www.census.gov/econ/www/history.html>).

- Information on the Retail Trade sector appears in digest form in reports from the economic census and surveys and are available from more than 1,400 government and U.S. Census Bureau depository libraries across the country. These depositories consist primarily of college and university libraries. Many smaller libraries also maintain collections of census publications.
- Business and Industry Data Centers (BIDCs) are the result of a U.S. Census Bureau pilot project launched in 1988. The U.S. Census Bureau and other Federal Government agencies furnish economic data and related assistance and training to aid a number of BIDCs in furthering economic development in their states.
- All of the states, plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Virgin Islands of the United States have Census State Data Centers that assist the public with printed and electronic census data. Additionally, some states also have business and industry data centers, which specialize in economic data.
- A network of Regional Data Centers (RDCs) and the Suitland, MD, research facility offer qualified researchers restricted access, in

secure environments, to data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau's surveys and censuses that are not included within the agency's publication program. Researchers must submit research proposals to the RDCs and the U.S. Census Bureau for review and approval. Upon approval, researchers are subject to the confidentiality restrictions of Title 13, United States Code-Census.

### How the Data Are Published

Most of the economic census Retail Trade sector statistics are issued on CD-ROM, and online through the U.S. Census Bureau's American FactFinder and in PDF format at <http://www.census.gov>. Printed products may be ordered by mail, telephone, and the Internet from—

Superintendent of Documents  
U.S. Government Printing Office  
P.O. Box 371954  
Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7954  
Telephone: 202-512-1800  
Fax: 202-512-2250  
<http://www.gpo.gov>

Electronic products may be purchased by mail from—  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
U.S. Census Bureau (MS1921)  
P.O. Box 277943  
Atlanta, GA 30384-7943

Electronic products may be ordered by telephone or fax from—

Administrative and Customer  
Services Division  
Customer Services Branch  
U.S. Census Bureau  
Washington, DC 20233  
Telephone: 301-457-4100  
Fax: 888-249-7295  
or 301-457-3842

Customer Services can print and bind any PDF report on demand, priced at \$25 or more per report, depending upon the number of pages. (A list of reports, with page counts, is available via the U.S. Census Bureau's Internet site (<http://www.census.gov>), in the Economic Census section of the Catalog: Publications.)

### Factfinder for the Nation

General information about the U.S. Census Bureau's various statistical programs is contained in the publications of the Factfinder for the Nation. Inquiries and suggestions about the Retail Trade statistics program and other U.S. Census Bureau activities are invited. Write to—

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