

BUILD YOUR RETAIL MUSCLE



— The Founder Problem Finder —

10 common retail problems.

30 podcast episodes.

One better next step.



Retail Solved | Protect runway. Improve execution. Compete smarter.

BUILD YOUR RETAIL MUSCLE

The Founder Problem Finder

10 common retail problems. 30 podcast episodes. One better next step.

Start with the problem in front of you. Then build the next retail muscle.

Bulletproof Your CPG Brand

Listen at RetailSolved.com/podcast or wherever you get your podcasts.

START WITH THE PROBLEM IN FRONT OF YOU

Retail can get complicated fast.

You win the retailer. Sales go up. A broker or distributor gets involved. Promotions begin. Reports multiply. Then the questions get harder.

Why is cash tighter? Why is the product not moving? Why are deductions showing up? What should the broker own? Which report should I trust? What happens after the retailer says yes?

That is why I built this guide.

Bulletproof Your CPG Brand now includes more than 340+ conversations with founders, retailers, category leaders, operators, industry builders, shopper and data experts, and people who helped shape many of the systems this industry still uses.

You do not need to listen to all of them.

Start with the problem you are trying to solve today.

Each section gives you:

- one retail muscle to build
- three episodes to start with
- one action you can take now
- one practical place to go deeper

There are **30 different episodes in this guide. No repeats.**

The goal is not to complete a curriculum.

Pick one problem. Learn one useful skill. Apply it to one item at one retailer. See what changes. Then build the next muscle.

WHAT RETAIL JUDGMENT LOOKS LIKE

Retail Muscle is not memorizing more information.

It is learning to recognize what the obvious answer may be missing, connect the shopper, retailer, category, economics, and execution, make a better decision, act, learn, and repeat.

Every report, dataset, model, expert, broker, software platform, and AI tool has a field of view.

Use the signal.

Then ask what it can see, what it cannot see, and what would change your decision.

That is how you use the easy button without becoming dependent on the easy answer.

Built from the work, not theory.

The principles in this guide come from real retail decisions where better context changed the outcome.

- **\$15MM assortment opportunity identified inside distribution a brand already had.**
- **An accepted 11-SKU cut became four more SKUs per store** after shopper and retailer context changed the decision.

- **More than \$25MM in lost distribution opportunity helped reclaim** by rebuilding focus around the productive core.
- **A product at risk of discontinuation was saved and its footprint expanded** after better shelf evidence changed the story.

The point is not the size of the numbers.

The point is that expensive retail problems often hide behind results that look normal on the surface.

That is why the first job is to identify the right problem.

See the proof: RetailSolved.com/case-studies/

HOW TO LISTEN

Use this guide however it is easiest for you.

Listen on the Retail Solved podcast page
RetailSolved.com/podcast

Type any episode number into the player and listen right on the page.

Or listen anywhere you normally get your podcasts.

You are not trying to complete a curriculum.

You are trying to make one better decision.

Start with the problem creating the most pressure right now.

1. I NEED TO GET INTO RETAIL.

Build this retail muscle

Make the buyer's decision easier by connecting product fit, shopper value, category contribution, retailer economics, and what has to happen after the yes.

Start here

Episode 270 — Retailers Don't Buy Products. They Buy Confidence.

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session270

Build the credibility, preparation, and retailer understanding that make the buyer more comfortable saying yes.

Episode 304 — Stop Pitching Your Brand. Become the Advisor the Retailer Trusts.

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session304

Shift the conversation from what you want to what helps the retailer make a better decision.

Episode 335 — What Retail Buyers Need to See Before They Say Yes.

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session335

Make the buyer's decision easier by answering the questions that matter before scarce shelf space is awarded.

Try this now

Before your next buyer meeting, answer five questions on one page:

1. Where does it go?
2. Who buys it?
3. What can you show the retailer they do not already know?
4. What does the retailer gain?
5. What happens after they say yes?

Pressure-test the easy answer

Getting the meeting is not proof the business is ready. What happens if the retailer says yes tomorrow?

Retailer usefulness check

What will the buyer know, understand, or be able to do better because you were in the meeting?

Go deeper

New Item Essential System

RetailSolved.com/guide13

2. I GOT THE YES. NOW WHAT?

Build this retail muscle

Turn authorization into **productive distribution** by protecting the core assortment, placement, availability, execution, support, and the shopper experience.

Start here

Episode 336 — The \$15M Opportunity Hiding in Stores They Already Had.

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session336

See how a brand can be gaining distribution while the wrong SKU mix weakens velocity, trade effectiveness, and the distribution it already earned.

Episode 338 — We Finally Got the Stores. Now How Do We Make Them Work?

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session338

If your brand is already in retail but the results are not where you want them to be, this conversation will help you think differently about what happens next.

Episode 340 — Getting Onto the Shelf Isn't the Win. Becoming Irreplaceable Is.

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session340

Getting onto the shelf is only the first win. The real opportunity is becoming valuable enough to the shopper and the retailer that you become increasingly hard to replace.

Try this now

Pick one authorized item at one retailer.

First ask whether the retailer has the **core assortment shoppers look for first**.

Then check:

- placement
- inventory
- replenishment
- pricing
- promotional support
- ownership
- what the shopper actually sees

Pressure-test the easy answer

Distribution can say the item is authorized. What evidence tells you the shopper can actually find and buy it?

Retailer usefulness check

What are you doing after the yes that gives the retailer more confidence in the next yes?

Go deeper

15-Minute CPG Runway Leak Finder

RetailSolved.com/leakfinder

3. MY BROKER IS NOT DELIVERING WHAT I EXPECTED.

Build this retail muscle

Keep ownership of the strategy while giving the broker a clearer assignment, better evidence, useful field-intelligence questions, accountability, and a review rhythm.

Start here

Episode 14 — How to Build & Manage a Broker Sales Team

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session14

Set expectations and manage the broker as a sales partner instead of hoping activity turns into progress.

Episode 117 — Maximize Broker Effectiveness & Sales Growth

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session117

Build clearer priorities, scorecards, accountability, and better collaboration.

Episode 132 — Fire Your Broker? A Smarter Retail Growth Strategy

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session132

Diagnose whether the real problem is the partner, the assignment, the economics, or the strategy before making a change.

Try this now

Give the broker:

- one retailer
- one live priority
- one definition of success
- the evidence you expect back
- one date to review what changed

Pressure-test the easy answer

Is the broker underperforming, or have they been given an unclear job with no useful definition of success?

Retailer usefulness check

Is the broker helping the retailer solve something, or merely carrying your request into the meeting?

Go deeper

Broker Advantage Playbook

RetailSolved.com/guide11

4. SALES ARE GROWING. WHY IS CASH GETTING TIGHTER?

Build this retail muscle

Separate visible growth from productive growth by understanding what the growth is really costing in cash, support, inventory, trade, distribution, and operating complexity.

Start here

Episode 269 — Your Sales Can Grow While Your Runway Disappears.

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session269

Effective brand management and brand building require a deep understanding of consumer behavior, customer experience management, and strategic planning.

Episode 329 — Your Brand Isn't Broken. The Math Got Less Forgiving.

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session329

Why many CPG founders feel pressure even when sales are growing, and why tighter cash often points to deeper issues in pricing, trade, execution, and the way the business is being managed.

Episode 337 — More Retail Doors. Less Cash? The Hidden Cost of CPG Growth.

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session337

I break down the Retail Door Cost Stack and show you how to pressure-test one retailer before funding the next expansion.

Try this now

Choose one retailer and trace one dollar of sales from invoice to cash.

Include:

- margin
- distributor costs
- trade
- deductions
- inventory
- timing
- the work required to support the account

Pressure-test the easy answer

Sales are up. Which costs, commitments, and cash requirements grew faster?

Retailer usefulness check

Can you support the retailer consistently without making promises the business cannot afford to keep?

Go deeper

15-Minute CPG Runway Leak Finder

RetailSolved.com/leakfinder

SEE THIS IN PRACTICE

Visible growth was hiding erosion in the core.

A focused distribution-recovery system helped reclaim **more than \$25MM in lost opportunity.**

Read the 2-minute case study: [RetailSolved.com/case-studies/
#core-distribution](https://RetailSolved.com/case-studies/#core-distribution)

5. MY PROMOTIONS ARE NOT PAYING BACK.

Build this retail muscle

Manage trade as an investment with a job, shopper behavior, retailer outcome, complete cost, execution standard, learning, and next decision.

Start here

Episode 186 — Trade Marketing: Your Brand's Growth Engine

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session186

Use trade to create productive demand and learning instead of treating it as a calendar expense.

Episode 311 — Trade Marketing Isn't a Cost. It's a Growth System.

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session311

I break down how trade marketing actually works—and why 70%+ of trade spend is wasted. Learn why promotions should drive behavior change (not just volume), how to distinguish incremental sales from subsidized sales, why retailers want better promotions—not more of them—and how execution determines success at shelf.

Episode 332 — Your Promotion Increased Sales. So Why Did Cash Get Tighter?

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session332

Look beyond the sales spike to the economics, execution, and next decision.

Try this now

Before repeating one promotion, write down:

- its job
- the shopper behavior it should change
- the retailer benefit
- the full cost
- the execution result
- what you will change next time

Remember:

- Trade can amplify a strong assortment. It can also subsidize a weak one.

Pressure-test the easy answer

The promotion produced a lift. Did it create profitable incremental behavior, or did it simply move volume around?

Retailer usefulness check

What did the promotion teach the retailer about the shopper, category, occasion, or next event?

Go deeper

8 Strategies to Maximize Trade Marketing ROI

RetailSolved.com/guide7

6. DEDUCTIONS KEEP SURPRISING US.

Build this retail muscle

Move upstream from recovery to prevention by tightening trade decisions, documentation, pricing, forecasting, accountability, and ownership.

Start here

Episode 182 — Stop Wasting Trade Spend: Fix Deductions Fast

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session182

Connect deduction pain to the trade and operating decisions that create it.

Episode 184 — Stop Deduction Leaks & Boost Trade ROI

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session184

Identify where deduction leakage and weak promotion discipline quietly erode margin.

Episode 305 — Recovering the Deduction Isn't the Win. Preventing the Next One Is.

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session305

Build a prevention system around agreements, pricing integrity, forecasting, documentation, and accountability.

Try this now

Pull your last six deductions and classify each by root cause.

Then ask:

Which could have been prevented before the invoice, shipment, promotion, or claim was created?

Pressure-test the easy answer

The deduction code tells you what was charged. Does it tell you where the problem actually began?

Retailer usefulness check

Which upstream fix would make the transaction cleaner for both your team and the retailer?

Go deeper

Effective Deduction Management

RetailSolved.com/guide21

7. I HAVE THE REPORTS. I STILL DO NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO.

Build this retail muscle

Start with the decision, then add the shopper, basket, retailer, category, competitive, field, economic, and ownership context needed to act.

Start here

Episode 316 — You Have the Data. Why Don't You Know What to Do Next?

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session316

Data tells you what happened. The shopper explains why. Clarity determines what happens next.

Episode 330 — The Numbers Said Yes. \$100,000 Later, We Learned What They Couldn't See.

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session330

Start with the decision instead of building another report that only explains the past.

Episode 331 — More People. More Software. Why the Same Decisions Keep Coming Back.

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session331

Define the question, owner, evidence, and operating rhythm so the decision stops returning to the founder.

Try this now

Take the report your team reviews most often and complete this sentence:

- **The decision this report should help us make is _____.**

Then ask:

- What does this source actually measure?
- What can it not directly see?
- What other context could reverse the recommendation?
- What would make us change our mind?

Pressure-test the easy answer

Every dataset has a field of view. What sits outside this one?

Retailer usefulness check

How will this decision help the retailer improve the shelf, category, shopper experience, economics, or execution?

Go deeper

Retail Clarity Decision Tools

RetailSolved.com/DecisionTools

SEE THIS IN PRACTICE

An accepted assortment recommendation said **remove 11 SKUs**.

Better shopper and retailer context changed the outcome to **four more SKUs per store**.

Read the 2-minute case study: RetailSolved.com/case-studies/#11-skus

8. MY PRODUCT IS NOT MOVING AT SHELF.

Build this retail muscle

Fix findability, placement, shopper understanding, availability, value communication, assortment, and execution before assuming the product itself is the problem.

Start here

Episode 129 — Retail Shelf Strategy: Win Placement & Growth

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session129

Understand how placement changes perception, trial, velocity, and the retailer story.

Episode 318 — A Great Product Can Still Lose When Shoppers Don't Understand It.

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session318

Great products don't win because they're interesting—they win with experience, understand, & repeat. Your biggest retail mistake (it's not what you think)

Episode 334 — The Promotion Was Approved. So Why Is the Shelf Empty?

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session334

Your report may eventually tell you the promotion underperformed. It may not tell you that the shopper never had a fair chance to respond.

Try this now

Stand in front of one real shelf or use a current shelf photo.

Ask:

- Where will the shopper look?
- What sits beside us?
- Is the right core assortment present?
- Is the item in stock?
- Is the value obvious?
- What changed from the plan?

Pressure-test the easy answer

A POS scan proves a transaction happened. What evidence tells you what the shopper saw before and after that transaction?

Retailer usefulness check

What shelf problem can you help the retailer see and fix before it becomes a sales problem?

Go deeper

New Item Essential System

RetailSolved.com.com/guide13

See this in practice

A fast-growing snack brand was nearly discontinued because shoppers could not reliably find it.

Better shelf evidence helped save the distribution and expand the footprint.

Read the 2-minute case study:

RetailSolved.com/case-studies/#shelf-placement

9. I NEED TO UNDERSTAND MY SHOPPER BETTER.

Build this retail muscle

Move beyond the products the shopper already bought and understand the problem, need state, occasion, exact language, alternatives, basket, and unmet demand behind the decision.

Start here

Episode 53 — From Autoimmune Crisis to CPG Disruptor With Megan Reamer, Jackson's Honest

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session53

Explore how storytelling wins in fiercely competitive categories, why community matters in natural products, and how retailers partner with brands that drive traffic, loyalty, and meaningful differentiation.

Episode 323 — See Where the Shopper Is Going Before the Market Catches Up With Suzie Yorke

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session323

The brands that deeply understand where the shopper is going gain an enormous advantage before competitors fully react.

Episode 333 — The Best Product Doesn't Win. The Product That Solves the Right Problem Does.

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session333

Use real shopper language and need states to strengthen value, positioning, and the retailer story.

Try this now

Ask ten customers:

- Think about the last time you bought or used our product. What were you trying to solve, make easier, improve, or enjoy?

Save their exact words.

Then ask:

- What else was part of that trip or occasion?
- What would you have bought if our product did not exist?
- Where else do you shop for this need?
- What do you wish existed that you cannot find today?

Pressure-test the easy answer

Retail data is very good at describing what shoppers bought inside the store. What demand might exist outside the assortment you are already measuring?

Retailer usefulness check

What shopper need, mission, or occasion can your brand help the retailer understand and serve better?

Go deeper

Shopper Signal Flywheel

RetailSolved.com/guide31

SEE THIS IN PRACTICE

A syndicated database classified roughly **68% of the relevant category as “not stated” or similar.**

Rebuilding the taxonomy around the shopper exposed the opportunity.

Read the 2-minute case study: RetailSolved.com/case-studies/#shopper-data

10. WE ARE GROWING FASTER THAN OUR SYSTEMS.

Build this retail muscle

Build the operating capacity behind growth so new doors, more people, more inventory, and more complexity do not keep routing every important decision back to the founder.

Start here

Episode 307 — Profit Isn't Cash. Why Growing CPG Brands Still Run Out of Money.

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session307

Understand how inventory, cash conversion, financial clarity, and ruthless prioritization protect the business as it grows.

Episode 326 — Growth Exposes Every Weakness in the Business.

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session326

Build rhythm, focus, and operating discipline before complexity outruns the organization.

Episode 339 — Your Brand Grew. Why Did Everything Get Harder?

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session339

So why do more stores, more sales, more people, and more data so often leave a brand with tighter cash, more fires, and harder decisions?

Try this now

Write down one recurring decision that still comes back to the founder.

Define:

- the question
- the owner
- the evidence
- the exception rule
- the review rhythm
- what should happen without the founder in the room

Pressure-test the easy answer

Before adding another person, tool, meeting, or process, what decision is the business actually struggling to make repeatedly?

Retailer usefulness check

Will this operating fix make your brand easier to buy from, easier to execute, and more dependable at shelf?

Go deeper

Retail Operating System

RetailSolved.com/retailsystem

WHAT THIS GUIDE IS REALLY ABOUT

Getting the meeting matters.

Winning the pitch matters.

Getting the retailer to say yes matters.

But access is not the finish line.

The expensive part begins when the brand has to turn that opportunity into:

- productive distribution
- repeat purchase
- stronger retailer economics
- protected margin
- cleaner execution
- a business that can support the growth

The industry is very good at celebrating the win.

Retail muscle is what helps you make the win last.

Retail Muscle is what helps you make the win last.

Retail Judgment is what helps you recognize when the obvious answer is missing something important.

That means understanding enough of the fundamentals to keep your hand on the wheel when you use a broker, distributor, consultant, report, dashboard, software platform, AI tool, or outside expert.

Use the help.

Use the tools.

Use the expertise.

But know:

- what question you are trying to answer
- what the evidence actually measures
- what the evidence cannot see

- what good looks like
- what the economics need to be
- what would change your decision
- who owns what happens next

You cannot guarantee the retailer gives you more opportunity.

But the more useful, dependable, and insightful your brand becomes, the more reasons the retailer has to trust you with the next conversation.

SEE THE PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE

You do not have to take these ideas on faith.

Start with the short case study that sounds closest to the problem in front of you.

Wrong assortment / productive distribution

A brand was already gaining distribution. The wrong SKU mix weakened velocity, promotions, and competitive strength. Fixing the core exposed roughly a **\$15MM opportunity gap**.

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session336

Case-study hub: RetailSolved.com/case-studies/

11-SKU cut → four more SKUs per store

An accepted recommendation said to remove 11 SKUs. Better shopper and retailer context changed the decision.

Read: RetailSolved.com/case-studies/#11-skus

More than \$25MM in lost distribution opportunity

Visible growth was hiding erosion in the core.

Read: RetailSolved.com/case-studies/#core-distribution

Saved from discontinuation and expanded

The topline did not explain what shoppers were experiencing at shelf.

Read: RetailSolved.com/case-studies/#shelf-placement

Shopper taxonomy exposed the opportunity

A syndicated database classified roughly 68% of the relevant category as “not stated” or similar.

Read: RetailSolved.com/case-studies/#shopper-data

See all Retail Solved case studies:

RetailSolved.com/case-studies/

BUILD THE NEXT RETAIL MUSCLE

You do not build a stronger retail business by learning everything at once.

You build it one practical skill at a time.

Take what you learned in this guide.

Apply it to one item at one retailer.

See what changes.

Capture what worked.

Then repeat it until the lesson becomes part of the way your brand operates.

One skill. One item. One retailer. One better result. Then build the next muscle.

Keep the practical tools close

The **Retail Clarity Founder Toolkit™** is the practical field library for the retail fundamentals founders are expected to know but are rarely taught as one connected system.

When the next problem appears, you do not have to start from scratch.

Use the Toolkit to find the guide, checklist, calculator, or framework that matches the decision in front of you.

Explore the Retail Clarity Founder Toolkit™

RetailSolved.com/RetailToolkit

When the problem does not fit a template

Sometimes the team already has reports, tools, people, and processes working on the issue, but the decision is still unclear.

That is the job of **Retail Clarity Decision Tools™**: connect the information to the question, the context, the decision, the owner, and the next action.

Explore Retail Clarity Decision Tools™

RetailSolved.com/DecisionTools

KEEP LEARNING

The Founder Problem Finder is the front door.

The **Bulletproof Your CPG Brand** podcast contains 340+ conversations across the retail problems founders face as they grow.

Listen on the Retail Solved podcast page or wherever you normally get your podcasts.

RetailSolved.com/podcast

If this guide helped you see something differently, please share it with another founder who needs it.

Retail Solved

Build your retail muscle. Protect runway. Improve execution. Compete smarter. RetailSolved.com

[illegible]

For More Inspiration:

- Podcast: [64 Make It Personal: Build a Brand Movement With Neil Grimmer, Habit and Plum Organics](#)
- Podcast: [102 Stop Talking at Shoppers—Start Telling Stories With Beau Haralson, Human Design](#)
- Podcast: [120 Convert Shoppers Into Loyal Brand Evangelists](#)
- Podcast: [163 Shopper Loyalty: Turn Buyers into Brand Fans](#)
- Podcast: [167 Digital Strategy to Grow & Future-Proof Your CPG Brand](#)
- Podcast: [209 Find Your Ideal Shopper With Jessica Malach, Social Nature](#)
- Podcast: [283 Why Storytelling Turns Shoppers Into Evangelists](#)

BUILD THE NEXT RETAIL MUSCLE

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WHEN THE PROBLEM DOES NOT FIT A TEMPLATE

If your team already has reports, tools, or people working on this issue but the decision is still unclear, start with one live decision and the information you already have.

Explore Retail Clarity Decision Tools™ RetailSolved.com/DecisionTools

NOT SURE WHICH RETAIL MUSCLE TO BUILD NEXT?

For years, founders have brought me the questions they were struggling to answer.

That is why I started the **Bulletproof Your CPG Brand** podcast.

More than 335 episodes later, the library includes conversations with founders, retailers, category-management pioneers, natural-products industry builders, CPG leaders and experts who helped shape many of the systems our industry still uses today.

You do not need to listen to all of them. Start with the problem you are trying to solve.

Find the episodes that match your problem:

Get the: [The Founder Problem Finder](#)

10 common retail problems. 30 podcast episodes. One better next step.

Explore the podcast:

RetailSolved.com/podcast



Connect With Me On LinkedIn: [Daniel Lohman, CPSA](#)

If this guide helped you see something differently, please share it with another founder who needs it.