

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.

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 336+ 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.

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 retailer's decision easier by connecting product fit, shopper value, category contribution, economics, and what happens after the yes.

Start here

Episode 43 — Retailers & Brands: A Shared Fate Strategy

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session43

Learn why the strongest retailer relationships are built around shared success, not a one-sided ask.

Episode 104 — The Essential New Item Checklist for Retail

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session104

Pressure-test the fundamentals that need to be clear before the launch.

Episode 335 — CPG Pitch Deck: 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?

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 — More Retail Doors Won't Fix the Wrong Assortment

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

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session334

Separate a shopper problem from an execution problem before the post-event report points you in the wrong direction.

Episode 321 — Most Brands Miss This Critical Step After Production

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session321

Connect what happens after production to retailer readiness, inventory, and execution.

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

Go deeper

15-Minute CPG Runway Leak Finder

RetailSolved.com/leakfinder

SEE THIS IN PRACTICE

A brand was already gaining retail distribution, but retailers and brokers were building inconsistent assortments. Core items shoppers looked for first were missing while specialty items gained placement.

Fixing the core assortment exposed roughly a **\$15MM opportunity gap** and strengthened the brand's ability to compete and promote.

Hear the case study: RetailSolved.com/session336

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

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, distributor economics, and operating complexity.

Start here

Episode 197 — Build a Profitable CPG Brand With Focus
Listen: RetailSolved.com/session197

See why disciplined focus can protect profitability before expansion adds cost and complexity.

Episode 222 — Distributor Horror Stories: Protect Your Brand
Listen: RetailSolved.com/session222

Understand how fees, free fills, payment timing, inventory, and weak execution can make distribution look healthier than the economics really are.

Episode 324 — Your Sales Are Up. So Why Is Cash Still Tight?
Listen: RetailSolved.com/session324

Trace the gap between the topline and the cash that actually reaches the business.

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

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

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 329 — Your Brand Is Not Broken. The Margin for Error Got Smaller.

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session329

Understand why the same promotion habits become more dangerous when the founder's and shopper's math gets tighter.

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.

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 — The Deduction Prevention System That Cuts Losses by 70%

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?

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 202 — Retail Is Broken: Fix It With Market Basket Strategy

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session202

Move beyond item-level reporting and understand how the shopper and the full basket create retailer value.

Episode 330 — More Reports Aren't the Problem. Your Decisions Are.

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 identify what information or context is still missing.

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 76 — Win Shelf Space with Smart Merchandising

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session76

Use shopper need states, market basket thinking, and clear shelf recommendations to make the item easier to find and buy.

Episode 129 — Retail Shelf Strategy: Win Placement & Growth

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session129

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

Episode 325 — Seth Goldman: How to Build a Profitable Brand with Values

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session325

Connect mission and differentiation to clear shopper value and profitable category growth instead of assuming purpose alone will move the item.

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?

Go deeper

New Item Essential System

RetailSolved.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 past demographics into the shopper's problem, exact language, need state, behavior, relationship, basket, and the value they create for the retailer.

Start here

Episode 52 — How Mastering Storytelling Exploded Sales

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session52

Learn how a sharper consumer story can change the way people understand and choose the brand.

Episode 328 — Your Email List May Know Before Your Dashboard Does

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session328

Treat direct shopper communication as a listening system that can surface signals before the sales report does.

Episode 333 — Your 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.

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 — Cash Flow, Profit & Focus for CPG Founders

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session307

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

Episode 316 — CPG Brands Are Doing This Wrong | Retail Strategy

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session316

See why data without external context leaves the team guessing about what should happen next.

Episode 326 — Growth Doesn't Break Brands. Complexity Does.

Listen: RetailSolved.com/session326

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

Try this now

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

Define:

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

Go deeper

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.

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 good looks like
- what the economics need to be
- what evidence should change your next decision

That is how a challenger brand becomes easier for the retailer to work with and harder for the competition to replace.

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 336+ conversations across the retail problems founders face as they grow.

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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

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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](#)

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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.

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Explore the podcast:

RetailSolved.com/podcast



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

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