

runstyle®

TREND INSIGHT CONSUMER SURVEY • SUMMER 2026

ZILLENNIALS & RUN SPECIALTY THE SURVEY

**RUNNERS AGED 24-35
SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS
ON RUN SPECIALTY.**

Formula4Media®

TREND INSIGHT

'ZILLENNIALS' & RUN SPECIALTY: THE SURVEY

In our latest *Trend Insight* consumer survey, we asked 230 “Zillennial” age shoppers for their thoughts on shopping for running products, with a particular focus on run specialty.

A few notes on the methodology and participant demographics and scope: This research evaluates a specific subset of the young adult running demographic,

utilizing a sample age range of 24 to 35 years old who have shopped in a run specialty store in the past year. This bracket captures “Zillennials”—the distinct micro-generation bridging the gap between Millennials and Generation Z.

The survey data reflects the habits of runners navigating key life milestones (such as transitioning from student athletics to independent fitness routines). Readers should note that this scope captures the older spectrum of Generation Z (ages 24–29) alongside trailing Millennials (ages 30–35). While it provides deep insight into early-career athletic consumers, it excludes the younger, school-aged segment of Gen Z (ages 14–23).

Key Insights Gleaned From This Demographic

- **The "Ex-Athlete" Shift:** You are catching people who just finished high school or college track/cross-country and are now figuring out how to run as working adults.
- **Disposable Income:** Unlike teenagers, this 24–35 group has the money to buy premium running shoes, apparel & gear, along with race registrations and more.
- **Community vs. Solitude:** This age group drives the current "run club" social boom to meet people outside of work.



SEIZE THE TREND!

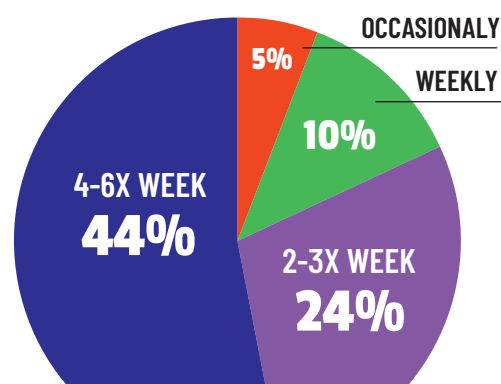
This survey, conducted by MESH01, included 230 respondents, male and female runners, aged 24-35. *Trend Insight* is a feature within *runstyle* that delivers research conducted on the MESH01 Platform. MESH01 collects data from a select panel of active runners.

Which statement best describes you?

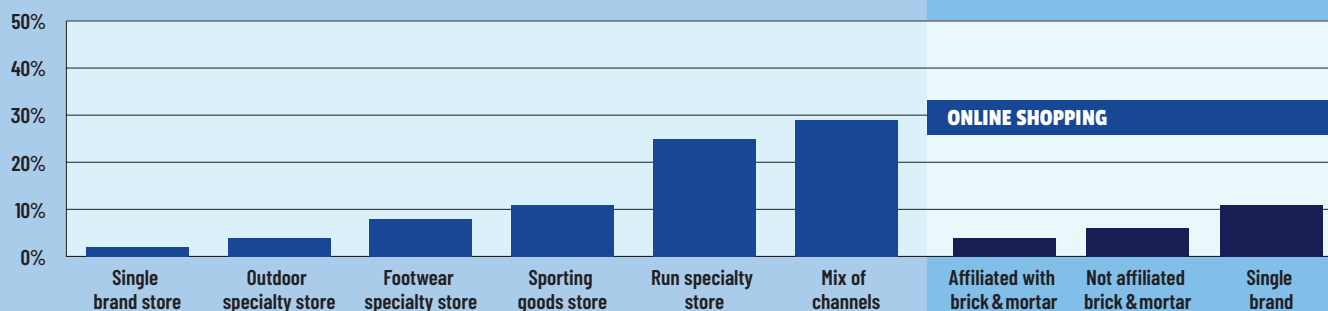
- 4% I only run for other activities.*
- 11% I run occasionally.
- 16% I run regularly, but don't consider myself a runner.
- 69% I consider myself a runner.

*sports, fitness classes, gym, etc.

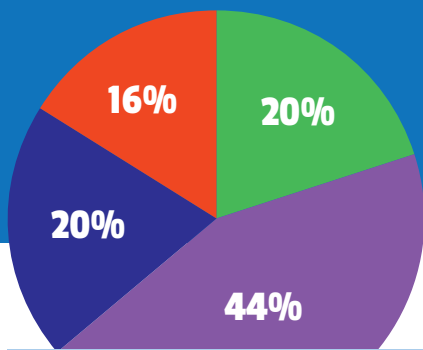
How often do you run?



Where do you usually buy running shoes, apparel and gear?



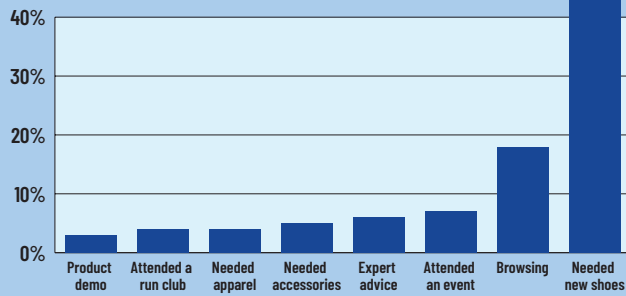
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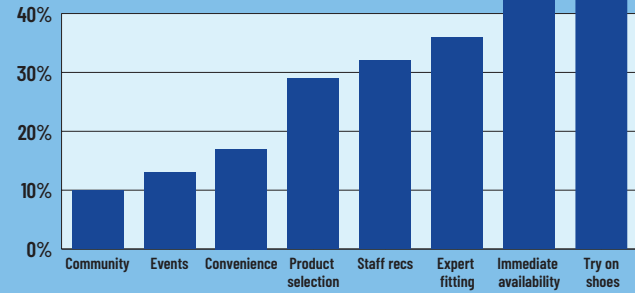
During the past 12 months, how many times have you visited a run specialty store?

■ ONCE ■ 2-3 X ■ 4-6 X ■ MORE THAN 6X

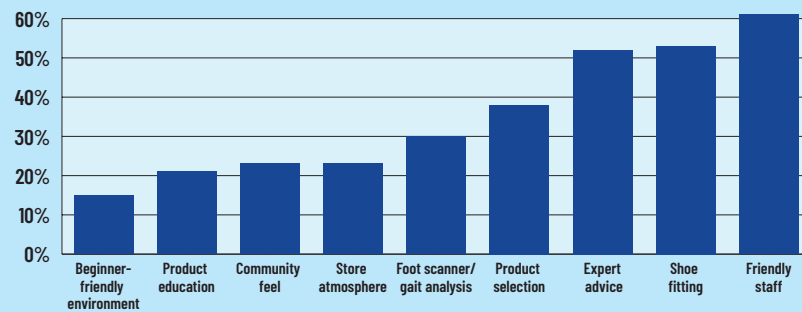
What prompted your most recent visit?



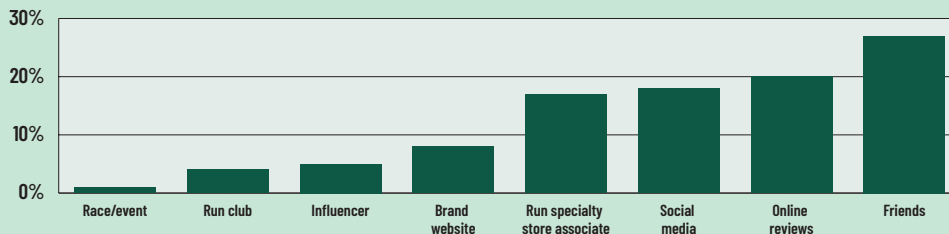
Why did you choose to visit a run specialty store instead of shopping online?



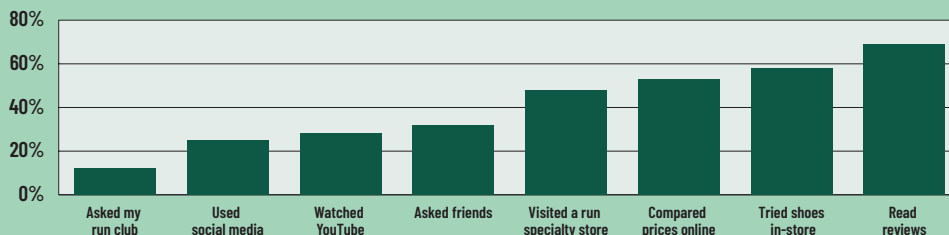
Thinking about your last visit to a run specialty store, what impressed you most?



Thinking about the last time you purchased running shoes, apparel or gear, how did you first learn about the brand(s) you purchased?



Before buying your most recent pair of running shoes, which of the following did you do?



60%

COMFORT AFTER TRYING ON SHOES

12%

BRAND REPUTATION

12%

PRICE

8%

REVIEWS

6%

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

1%

STYLE

What made the biggest difference in your purchase decision?

FOR THE RUN

WHAT'S NEW WHAT'S NEXT

FALL ISSUE 2026

**NEW PRODUCTS, TOP TRENDS, AND
WHAT'S RESONATING AT RUN SPECIALTY**

Footwear, Apparel, Essentials.

THE CHALLENGERS:

Disruptors & Emerging Brands to Watch in 2027.

WELLNESS + RUN:

Recovery Footwear, Nutrition & More.

SHOP TALK:

Run Specialty Retail Perspectives.



MATERIALS & DESIGN

CONSUMER SURVEY

AD CLOSE: 11/2

CREATIVE DUE 11/9

SHOW

THE RUNNING EVENT

**RUNNING.
PURE AND
SIMPLE.**



WINTER



SPRING



SUMMER



FALL

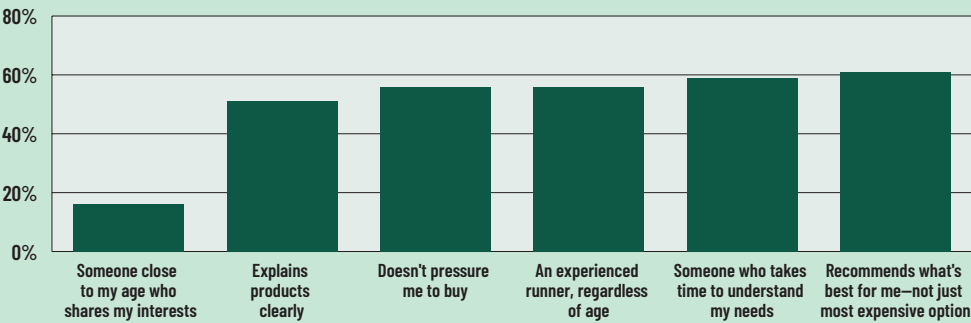
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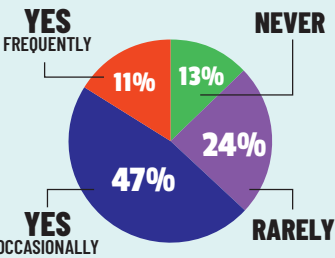
runstyle
TRENDS + ANALYSIS

TREND INSIGHT | 'ZILLENNIALS' & RUN SPECIALTY: THE SURVEY

Which qualities make you most likely to trust a run specialty store employee?



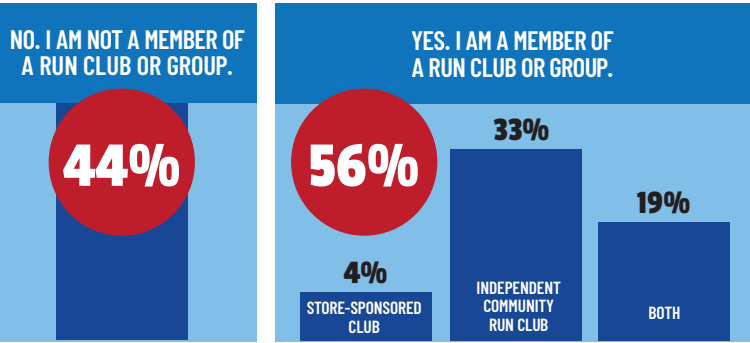
Have you ever tried on or received advice at a run specialty store but purchased elsewhere?



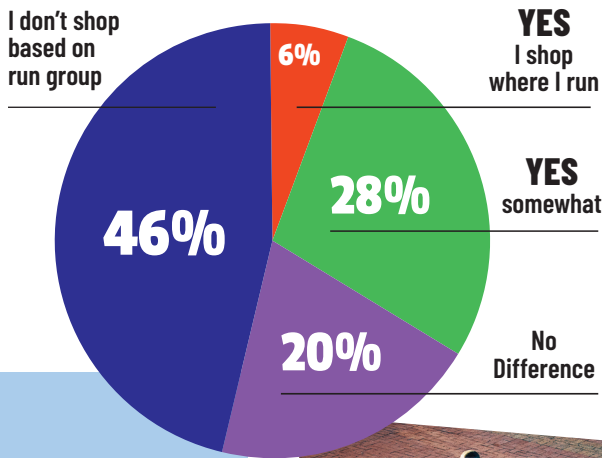
If yes, why?



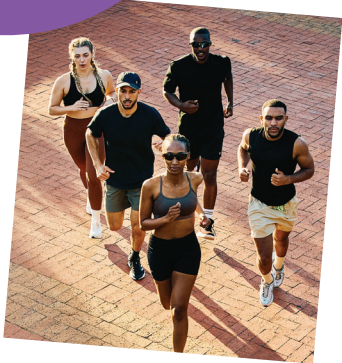
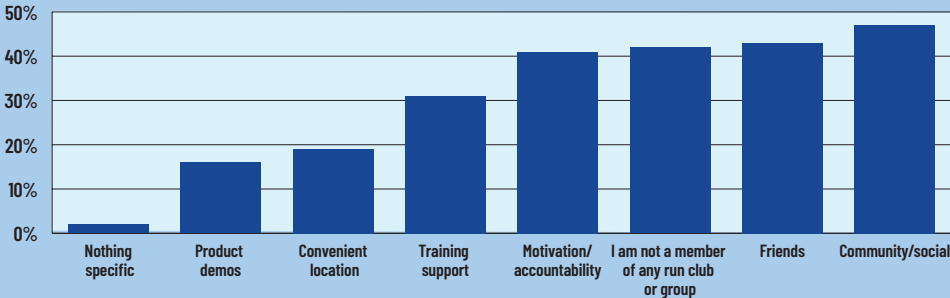
Describe Your Running Group Participation



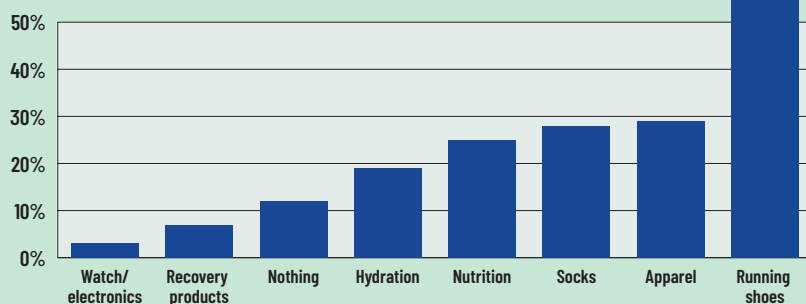
Has your run group influenced where you shop?



What do you value most about your run group?



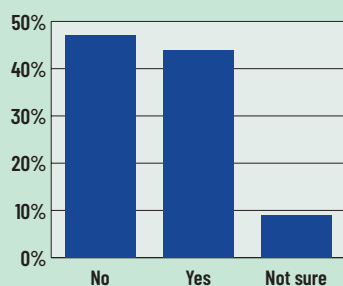
During your last visit, what did you purchase?



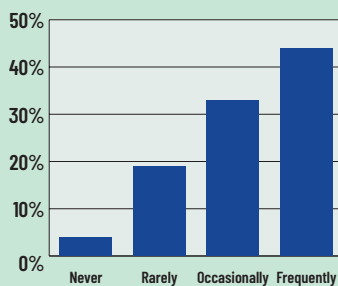
Do you find yourself more excited by established running brands or discovering newer brands? What drives that interest?

I tend to be more excited about discovering newer running brands. I like seeing fresh ideas, innovative designs, and products that stand out from the bigger, more established companies. If a newer brand offers great quality, comfort, or performance, I'm willing to give it a try rather than sticking to a familiar name.
FEMALE 25

Have you ever purchased a brand you had never heard of because it was recommended by a run specialty retailer?



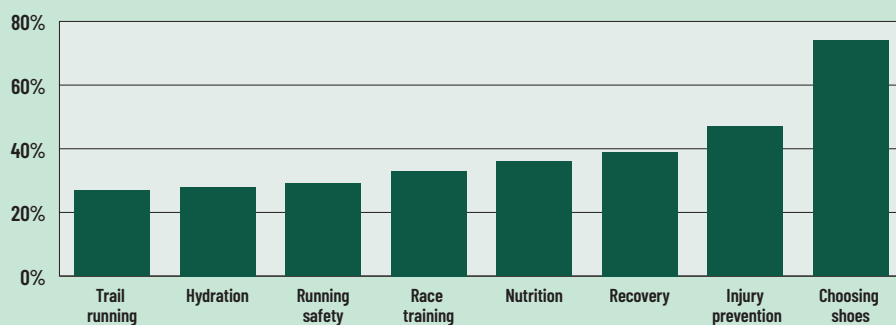
Have you ever chosen one running brand over another because of its sustainability or ethical practices?



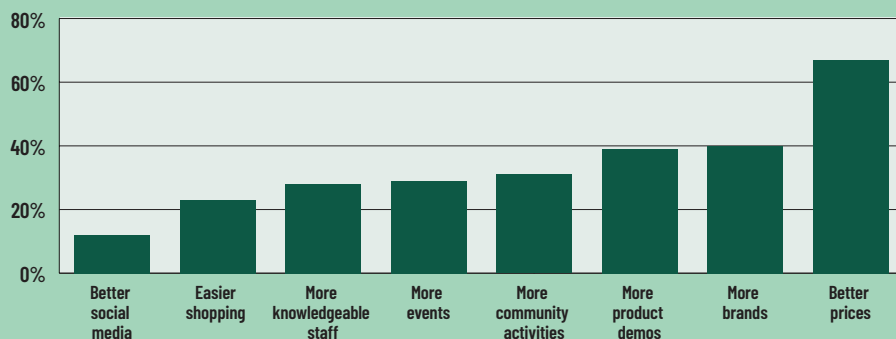
I am very excited about all the running shoes the brands are releasing today. It's more competitive than it's ever been and the brands are really all pushing each other to release the most technologically advanced running shoes at the best price. I'm really just infinitely curious about the experience each new version of a shoe will bring and that's what keeps me buying running shoes even when I don't need them!
MALE 28

More quotes on the next page...

Which topics would you most like your local run specialty store to help you with?



What would encourage you to visit a run specialty store more often?



Do you find yourself more excited by established running brands or discovering newer brands? What drives that interest?

FEMALE

I feel like the more established brands are tried and true and they have a larger ability to do R&D to improve the running technology. I fear newer brands might not have all the kinks worked out, but I'm definitely open to trying them if the price is cheaper. **Female 24**

I lean towards established brands but rely on recommendations from peers. If a newer brand has good reviews or exciting new offerings, then I'd be willing to try. **Female 33**

I like product testing new brands. I keep trying new ones because the more in the rotation the better. And some brands are better for different training periods! **Female 25**

Comfort drives my decision, so I am open to new brands. **Female 34**

My excitement comes from finding comfortable great fitting gear at great prices. Whether the brand is new or established makes little difference. **Female 31**

For shoes I like established brands but for accessories and fuel I will try new brands as they arise. **Female 35**

New. It's not the same as everyone else. **Female 25**

I am more driven to buy established running brands' shoes and discovering new brands for clothing. **Female 29**

I'd say discovering newer brands due to the fact that there's always space for something newer and better. I like to explore my options and am open to try new things and brands and give them the benefit of the doubt. **Female 35**

Excited by established brands. Driven by trust of previous good experiences. Curious about newer brands, but skeptical too. **Female 33**

I love my established running brands. I find myself drawn to new brands when I hear good reviews from trusted friends and experienced athletes. **Female 32**

I enjoy both but find excitement in new brands. Established brands have a track record with extensive research and communal backing. Newer brands bring innovative materials, fresh ideas and designs and willingness to challenge the status quo. What drives my interest is purpose and innovation. I am drawn to brands that improve comfort performance or an overall better experience. **Female 33**

I always love discovering new brands. When you are running 50 miles per week, you blow through shoes frequently. I prefer established running brands, but I also like discovering new brands. **Female 33**

I have run in the same brand of running shoes for 6 years now. I know they work for me and trust them. However, I do enjoy trying new brands. I typically enjoy trying them at a run club first or at a run store. When I go to run stores, I typically know what I am getting when I go in but enjoy trying on the new shoes or brands just to see. **Female 26**

I get excited by whichever brands are balancing comfort, durability, sustainability, and affordability. New brands tend to deliver more on sustainability and style, while established brands are better for comfort and durability. **Female 31**

I think I trust established brands better. They have the history to show that these are durable shoes/this is a reputable brand. However, I get excited by new styles of shoes, which often I notice more in newer brands. **Female 27**

I tend to stick to brands that I know and trust! I've been wearing Brooks for as long as I can remember and I know I like them, so I stick with them. I tend not to stray because I am afraid I won't like it and it'll be a waste of money. **Female 25**

MALE

Established brands seem more exciting as they likely have more people working on research and development. **Male 28**

I prefer brands and shoes that I've used before, so I know how they'll work for me. But I am always interested in trying new brands that I think I'd like. **Male 27**

While I'm always open to trying new products, I feel the most exciting R&D typically comes from established brands (just due to budget constraints). R.A.D. and Mount to Coast are two brands who have pushed the envelope in recent years, and I'm very excited to try them both when the price is right. **Male 26**

I love finding new brands. I used to only use Nike but visiting my local specialty store when I was a cross-country runner showed me how to shop for gear and equipment designed for me. **Male 29**

I often get excited about newer brands. Newer brands tend to be more innovative and push for a unique feel that can feel better than an established brand. **Male 24**

Established running brands have an inherited reputation of trust that I cannot overlook. I'm more likely to trust an established running brand when it comes to shoes specifically. **Male 30**

Discovering innovations regardless of brand. New brands are great, but I need a solid track record to consider them. I have flat feet and wear orthotics — and I have a strong build — so recommendations tied to my specific needs are crucial. **Male 35**

Typically established brands are more of a known quantity. I'd only purchase from new brands if they were very clear about materials used. **Male 33**

Honestly both. I love new brands that are fresh and trying new things. And there are established brands that keep putting out consistently solid gear. But any brand that prioritizes quality and durability over a slick marketing campaign gets my interest. **Male 35**

I am more excited about established brands building on their legacy and current shoe lineup. **Male 32**

Established. I want to know they work. **Male 26**

I'd say I used to favor established brands, however, that changed a few years ago when Hoka first burst onto the scene. I love the running shoe industry and nerd out on specs and all the new companies releasing running shoes (Mount to Coast), and brands re-entering the run scene in recent years like Puma. **Male 30**

I am open to every brand. While I like established brands, I find it cool to find new brands and fashion that aren't as well-known, so people aren't all wearing the same thing I am. Therefore, it's fun because it sparks conversation because I am being constantly asked where I got the product and I can promote and push the new brand! **Male 34**

I'm usually more drawn to established running brands because I trust proven fit, durability, and performance over hype. That said, I'm open to newer brands if they solve a real problem: better comfort, better ride, lighter materials, improved durability, or a noticeably better fit. What drives my interest is performance first, then comfort, then whether the shoe actually holds up through training. **Male 35**

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