

smart

RETAIL

**PRACTICAL WINNING IDEAS AND
STRATEGIES FROM THE MOST
SUCCESSFUL RETAILERS
IN THE WORLD**

RICHARD HAMMOND

SMART RETAIL

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Winning ideas and strategies from the most
successful retailers in the world

RICHARD HAMMOND

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Smart Retail



... is still dedicated to customers—the people who pay our wages.

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I would like to add this last thing: all the effort, sacrifice, setbacks, and challenges have been worth it. Retail is the best life in the world.

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Introduction to this Edition



How to get the best from *Smart Retail*

Smart Retail is written from an enterprising store manager’s perspective—I’ve done that to make it easier to read but I want to be clear that whatever your role in retail, there is a lot to gain from giving the thing a read. In Appendix I are notes specific to various job roles: Take a look at them before you plunge into the main sections, of which there are four:

- 1 **You**—*personal tips for honing your retail eye.*
- 2 **Team**—*how to get the best from your people.*
- 3 **Customer**—*how to delight them.*
- 4 **Store**—*getting the environment right.*

Each section can be read in any order, or even on its own. You might want to start with whichever area you feel needs most work. It is fair to say that I believe most solutions to retail challenges can be found from within the team, which is why the “Team” section makes up such a big part of the book.

Above all, this is a working book. I invite you to flick through, to cherry-pick the bits that suit you best, scribble on the pages, tear stuff out, and share it. If I ever came into your store, I would love to see that your copy of the book has a broken spine, page corners turned down, a forest of Post-it notes sticking out the top, and coffee stains on the cover.

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Preface—Why retailing?



One thing that hasn't changed is that retail is still physically and mentally hard work. The pressure's always on; we're only ever as good as our last trading day. Every time we open the store, what follows could be a disaster or a triumph.

And that's the thrill of the thing, that's why we do it—get things right, get the team pulling together, make customers happy, and take some money . . . well, those are the days that keep us coming back for more. Getting retail right is thrilling—magic, even.

**Getting retail right
is thrilling—magic,
even.**

Welcome then to *Smart Retail*, where together we can try to make sure that you enjoy more good days, better profits, a happier team, an improved business performance, and a boost to your retail career. I love selling things in shops, it is my passion, and this book is all about sharing retail excellence so that we can all enjoy the good bits of that more often.

That there Internet thing

Selling online has had a massive impact on what we do and it is an impact that will continue to grow, not just through e-commerce but in how easily-available information and price-comparison forces change in the way retail works overall. Nowhere in the book though do I make much distinction between retailing on the Internet and retailing in a store—and that's because they are the *same* activity. Both forms are about selling products people want in nice, shoppable, environments—supported by robust systems, great customer service, and effective communications. Retail standards apply in the same way across both.

Where distinctions do apply is in the suitability of your product, positioning, and format to either form. The rule of thumb is this: If you are a bricks-and-mortar retailer then you are unwise to be without a credible

online outlet—it’s another store and one with a big potential catchment area. The other way around though and it’s less clear-cut: The Internet allows smaller retailers to reach far more people, more directly, and more powerfully than a few physical stores might.

As Internet retailing has matured, so too has an acceptance that both forms can learn from each other. Internet retailers have begun to understand better the principles of the complete customer experience, while bricks-and-mortar retailers have slowly begun to learn how to communicate better and how to give customers more reasons to come back. Reminding us that they exist, telling us about good things we might like to buy, and reminding us to come visit is something the best Internet retailers do superbly well—better than any high-street store. Internet retailers say “thank you” better than traditional ones too and that’s more powerful than you might think.

Asking the questions

Each edition of *Smart Retail* has been put together on the back of a simple question that I’ve asked the world’s best retailers: “What makes you so good?” Maybe it’s a surprise that they would reveal the answer to that question? That they have, over and over to me, is, I think, because great retailers have a passion not just for their own success but a determination that the more retail businesses out there who get retail right then the better off we all become. A vibrant retail sector plays a critical role in the success of economies and, as it goes, the UK in particular owes much of its last decade of success to the superb performance of some of the best retail businesses on the planet. Equally, when customers stop spending ... 2009 and 2010 were tough: We lost a few businesses but others strengthened and learned. I’ve experienced three recessions in 25 years of retailing now and I’m sure I’ll experience future ones too. We push through and we survive by continuing to give customers what they want, need, and didn’t know they were looking for.

Is it rocket science?

Because the book is founded on examples of best practice and because, as we will explore later, there are few “new tricks” in retail: Much of what we

cover has been done before; I make no secret of that. You will already know lots of it and you will easily understand all of it. This isn't a "bullshit fairy-dust consultants" book: This is a collection of answers to your challenges; it is a professional self-help resource—it's not about doing the impossible and being one of the tiny handful of people who invent something new; it's about helping you to make the best use of your own retail instincts and to benefit from the experiences of others.

Brass tacks

The essence of *Smart Retail* is about helping you to make more money, to win the sales battle, and to help you and your team stand out from the competition.

Stars of the shop floor

A good store manager can make a huge impact on the success of an individual store, much more so than a clever marketing director or number-lovin' finance chief can. With a good manager at the helm, great sales teams can make a big and immediate impact. Although I've presented the ideas here in straightforward terms, that doesn't mean they're not sophisticated: We're talking about best practice learned from time spent with the world's best retailers—everything here is accessible to store teams and everything is potentially incredibly powerful.

Much as I'd love the bosses to use *Smart Retail* to make positive changes, I'm hoping that grafters out there on the shop floor will read it too. I've had a lot of feedback from so-called "lowly" checkout people and sales assistants who have been inspired by *Smart Retail* to push themselves forward. So much for "lowly"—I'm really looking forward to the day when my agency is ringing you ex-checkout people and asking if we can come and work for you in your retail empires. It's been fun writing this edition but if just one more person, maybe you, uses the book to realize their true retail potential, well, that's worth more than gold to me.

That gives me masses of hope for your success too. There is nothing to stop you pushing yourself—good ideas, retail ability, and energy are

valuable—use the ideas and strategies in *Smart Retail* to make the breakout and to create momentum for yourself.

At the risk of this all going a bit Tony Robbins, you can do it!

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1

CHAPTER ONE

What do you want for yourself?

Why do you come to work? It's a cold wintry morning in a small town and you've got a store to open, a cash register to man, or a desk to get to. Why do you bother? It's an important question—it's worth thinking about and worth taking a grown-up look at the answers.

Whatever the specific answers, there's likely to be in there things like: our desire to feel good about ourselves through being good at stuff, to create a little security for our kids, to give our partners reasons to be proud of us, even material things like wanting enough money for a nice house or a great car—or to get enough cash together to stop working for a bit. All of that is good—what's important is that we be honest with ourselves. Once you work out why you're really hauling yourself into city center in the dark of a December morning—then you have a chance to understand how to get the best out of that day, the next week, and the next year.

It's a simple human thing: If I want a nice house I've got to earn money, if I've got to earn money I need to have a good job, if I'm going to have a good job then I need to perform and get noticed, if I'm going to get noticed then I need to do the numbers, if I'm going to do the numbers then I have to keep my team and customers happy ... you can keep this process winding back all the way to the one small thing—maybe something you hate doing—that you need to do right now, right after you've had five minutes of reading this. That small thing you do next—that's earning you that nice house. It is.

This process, this way of thinking, doesn't just apply to material stuff: Let's say your personal goal is a creative one, the work you do, the nasty

bits in particular, can be linked, by stepping back this way, to getting your play written, or to quitting retail to go to art school, or whatever. There is pride to be had in grafting in retail in order to use the results of that graft to move you forward toward a non-retail goal. Give the best you can to get the thing you want. Simple stuff.

Give the best you can to get the thing you want.

Action-planning means doing stuff

Most action planning is a load of old trash—action plans and reality are rarely aligned. It's simple v. complex: A good action plan is one that starts with a goal and then steps back from that goal, practical-step-by-practical-step, until it arrives at the very next thing you must do to move things along.

But just thinking about what you want to achieve is useless without a practical plan: I was taught the techniques of visioning by legendary trainer Bob Caton, and his practical technique is a cracker. Bob is more content with life than pretty much anyone I've ever met. His favorite visioning story is of the house he built for himself in Thailand—he bought a patch of land as soon as he could afford to and then every night at home in England, imagined himself sitting on the veranda at a house that didn't exist. He would describe to himself how it would feel, the taste of the cold beer in his mouth, the warmth of the breeze on his arms, the comfort of the chair, and so on. Then in the morning, he would picture the house once again, and this time he would run a very fast step-back from the beer on the veranda and right to the things he needed to do that day, like call a prospect or get on a 6:45 a.m. train. Two things happened for Bob—he felt better about things he wasn't all that keen on having to do and he got his house built.

So it's not just the end-goal that you think about—it's all those steps that link from there back to the right now. Here's a simplified rundown of Bob's vision:

- ▶ I want that first ice-cold beer on the veranda of my own house in Thailand.
- ▶ I need to build that house.

- ▶ I need to have the plans drawn up.
- ▶ I need to have the funds in place.
- ▶ My business needs to have been successful enough to generate x profit over y years.
- ▶ That means I need to have taught an average of xxx days training per year.
- ▶ Which would have come from three permanent clients and ten casual contracts.
- ▶ To hit those numbers, I need to have pitched nine major projects and developed one hundred good prospects.
- ▶ That means x phone calls and y letters over z period.
- ▶ I need to write four letters and make six calls today.

Of course, there are also technical steps I've left out for expediency such as understanding what you're selling, commissioning marketing material, and so on. You need to include all that in your plan. But you get the idea—it shows how the grind today, right now, can get you something cool and important in your life.

One of the best things you can do to get yourself motivated is to read Prof. Richard Wiseman's excellent *59 Seconds* (Macmillan, 2009)—in the motivation chapter, he'll tell you all about where visioning can go wrong and how to stop that from happening. He'll also tell you how things like sharing your goals make a provable difference to achieving them.

I'm not about to turn into some hokey self-help twonk here and ask you to stand on your chair and shout "I can." All I'm asking is for the moment's hesitation before rejecting an idea and for you to couple that to achieving your own personal ambitions.

At its simplest, all this is about being open to achieve things, being slower with "no," "impossible," and "just can't happen," and quicker with "let's find out," "let's try it." Thinking this way clears the path to achieving your personal goals.

Raw passion makes us great

All the best retailers are naturally passionate about their businesses. I would suggest it's the one single thing that unites them—without passion, you cannot achieve long-term success in retail. Sure, loads of other skills are important: leadership, an eye for product, team-building, accounting, service, and design. But all of these can to a greater or lesser extent be learned from a book. If you are weak in one or two of these areas you can still usually get by. But without passion, you just won't make a life in retail work for you.

Passion is what drives great retail; and customers, as well as colleagues, love it.

Passion is what drives great retail; and customers, as well as colleagues, love it. Passion is the magic ingredient that helps you to bring surprise, drama, great service, exciting products, and delight into the store.

Customers leave a store run by a passionate team feeling like they want to come back. The team looks forward to coming into work, knowing that today might be the day to break some records, have some fun, and create something great. You could be a cashier at ASDA or the head honcho at Target—as long as you feel that passion, the retail world is your oyster.

Passion to make things better

Passion is not about sales; it is about improvement. Mahendra Patel is one of the finest passionate retailers I've ever met. MP, as we all know him, worked most of his retail life as a store manager and then as a senior field manager. Before that, MP was a teacher in Uganda. In 1973, MP and his family had to flee for their lives in the wake of Ide Amin's murderous purge of the Ugandan Asian population. Arriving in the UK with nothing had, as you would expect, a deep impact on Mahendra. Many people would sink. MP didn't; he started out all over again, this time as a sales assistant in a Dixons store. After more than a quarter of a century in stores, and his having gone through so much, I couldn't understand why the ultra laid-back Mahendra always refused the offers of promotion into head office that regularly came his way (including one invite, I remember, that included a retail CEO sending down the company jet to bring MP back for lunch and a

chat). He could have been running the whole show, I would often, exasperated, tell him. I'll admit that I began to question where exactly Mahendra's passion was.

Then over a meal one evening, Mahendra told me: "I am a teacher, I always was. My job is to make as many people as I possibly can feel that they can be better than they are now, that they can improve their lot. Life is about hope and I've been lucky enough to give some of the people who have worked with me some of that hope."

I don't think I ever saw MP actually sell anything, but his stores, and regions, always performed better when he was at the helm. MP's passion was for improvement: not to create teams of sales animals but to make things better—better for colleagues and better for customers. That passion is what makes this retail business great.

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