

MEANING  
IN THE  
RETAIL MADNESS

*How to be an Essential Retailer*

TIM RADLEY



*“The madness of retail will be perceived only by those who find no meaning in it. Whilst the essential retailers will be those that embrace the sense of it.”*



## TIM RADLEY

Tim Radley is a retail consultant based near London. He brings to the table 30 years of being young in the industry.

He has worked with retail companies on a wide variety of strategic and operational projects, from back-end product development to front-end customer experience, and on most things in-between. His role has always been to introduce 'new' retail thinking and processes. To improve both the financial performance KPIs, and the human experiences of retail businesses. This has never been as important, as it is now.

He has been fortunate to work across the world of retail from Europe and Asia, to South America and the US. It has confirmed his view that retail people and customers are all 'cut from the same cloth,' yet are as diverse and wonderfully individual as his client list suggests.

Primark, Walgreens, Boots, Adidas, AllSaints, Ferrari, Luxottica, Ray-Ban, Nespresso, Bata, Halfords, Carrefour, Ladbroke's, Camper, Jack Jones, Marks & Spencer, Cortefiel, Sainsbury, Continente, Sonae, Otto Versand, BonPrix, World Duty Free, Sprinter, La Caixa, National Geographic, Real Madrid, KappAhl, Flex, Gruppo Vestebene, Alessi, Eroski, Gruppo Coin, OVS, Carrera, Aena, Heatons, Bally, Portaventura, Sony, Clarks, Benetton, Imaginarium, Dublin City Council, Porcelanosa, Northumbria University, Bialetti and Baltika.

In 2007 Tim set up VM-Unleashed to create a company that specializes in developing world-class customer experiences in physical and digital shops. He collaborates internationally as Director of Retail Experience at Ispira, based in Italy, and with agencies throughout Europe.

Tim is a popular and well-regarded speaker presenting at retail conferences across the globe. He regularly appears at the Retail Design Expo in London, the VM & Design show, and at In-Store Asia, the largest retail conference and trade fair in the Indian Sub-continent. He is also a judge on the VM&RD Retail Design Awards panel for Asia. He has advised the LCF (London College of Fashion) on retail course content and structure.

Tim contributes articles for a variety of magazines and radio features, discussing retail issues as varied as the "Omnichannel Store of the Future" to the "Saving of the High Street."

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the **Z** to **A** of retail disruption

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Businesses that are successfully disrupting the traditional ways of doing retail are creatively and commercially diverse, emerging from the worlds of imaginative new enterprises, and re-energized classic retail brands.

This book contains over a 100 specific insights of how 'doing things with meaning' is now the only way to be 'essential' to customers in this brave new retail world.

#### **ACTION PAGES**

How to make yourself into an 'Essential Retailer'

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With such a myriad of opportunities available to join the retail revolution, it can be difficult to know where to begin and how to proceed.

This book contains 75 Action Plans, linked to every area of retail innovation and evolution, outlining the reasoning behind every disruptive initiative and offering step-by-step guidance on how to achieve your goals.

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# Introduction

*“This book draws on my many years working with retail best practice and is driven by the things that I have seen, and those I never wish to see again.”*

“It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.” To paraphrase the words of Charles Dickens is to sum up the crossroads at which we find ourselves in the retail industry. Except that the revolution we face is not a work of fiction, it is real, and it is worldwide. It is however, being caused by a dissatisfaction of the masses, a growing groundswell of consumers with different buying priorities and product sentiments, and a system of mass production flooding the world with generic product beyond our needs and desires.

This worst of times has been brought to a head by the COVID pandemic. It has been the most brutal of encounters for the retail sector, but history will show that it was in fact the final poisoned cherry on the top of a crumbling retail cake that was for many well passed its sell-by date.

It is the best of times for disruption and innovation. Totally new businesses are being born from customer communities with the same concerns, and with a passion to approach the buying and selling of goods in a new way. These will flourish alongside

existing retailers who have prepared for these times. Far sighted businesses that could see the storm approaching, have ridden it out, and are emerging as better and more commercially attractive propositions.

It is also the best of times to write, and I hope, to read this book. This has also been a time coming. A time with many businesses still persevering with the familiar misguided and destructive strategies. I have written this book for anyone who wants to consider the alternatives.

This book draws on my many years working with retail best practice and is driven by the things that I have seen, and those I never wish to see again.

This book encapsulates two defining pillars that I have believed from my earliest days in the industry, and from my travels and travails from Europe to Asia, South America to the United States. That retail knowledge should be for everyone, and that retail expertise must be broad and inclusive.

This book is for all those retail employees who continue to surprise and inspire me with their own enthusiasm and appetite to learn and improve. Employees young and old, from the boardroom to the stockroom.

The retail business is a joined-up process that requires an astounding diversity of skills, activities, and functions. Many people with different areas of expertise must connect and integrate as part of a wider plan, a cohesive strategy, and a defining vision. I know that successful retail stories do not happen by accident, but through the skillful collaboration of these many people, guided with simple and singular objectives.

Every individual skill is richer, every single task is lighter, every

employee is wiser, when they can see and understand the wider context of their personal contributions.

Some non-fiction books invite the reader to “dip-in.” You are very welcome to dip into the chapters and the parts of the book that you feel are most relevant to you. But I would also encourage you to read everything, and to read it in the order that it is written. This book is a narrative, a story.

Simply “dipping-in” has been the scourge of many retailers. Executives have “dipped-in” their influential but sometimes misinformed opinions. Retail specialists have “dipped-in” their own expertise, ignorant to the wider processes. External agencies, creatives, and marketers have “dipped-in” their visions without understanding the everyday realities of a brand. I should know.

I hope this story reads well. The chapters are built around the familiar and enduring cornerstones of retail, the organisation, the product, the shops and channels, and above all, the people. I have sought to look through the eyes of retail people, the colleagues, and the customers. I have kept segmentation to a minimum, because the segmentation of functions and people serves no positive purpose.

Transversal issues such as technology, collaboration, marketing, training, ethics, and sustainability have been woven into the text wherever relevant. For progressive retailers, these topics must always be “in-mind,” considered and included in every decision and initiative.

I have developed ‘sketches’ to help illustrate and explain the disruptive concepts I discuss. There are also numerous best practice insights that will bring life and illumination to the text. Above all, I hope this makes the content accessible and relevant to everyone, whether you are a small cog in a large

business wheel, the only cog in your own entrepreneurial wheel, or an informed observer of the perpetually turning wheels of the retail industry. You are all welcome.

This book aims to communicate both breadth and depth of retail knowledge. A breadth of understanding across many functions of retail that allows precise initiatives to be taken with proper context. A depth of expertise that makes those initiatives both informed and actionable. To widen our horizons, to improve our surroundings.

This book is intended to make us think. Think as retailers, as customers, and for good measure, as part of humanity. In each of these guises we impact an industry that has lost its way.

Some will see the meaning in what I would like to say, others will discard it.

Ultimately, the madness of retail will be perceived only by those who find no meaning in it. Whilst the essential retailers will be those that embrace the sense of it.

I hope that you can apply the stories in this book to your own individual context. I wish you every success as you write your own story in this amazing industry. Successful retail must be built on pragmatism and processes, on the collaboration and the integration of its many facets, but without a story it really has nothing to say.

Without a story we all have nothing to say.

Here is my story. I look forward to hearing yours.