Foreword

*Advanced Technologies Management for Retailing: Frameworks and Cases* brings together research, insights, and practices of strategic management applications that optimize both the opportunities and challenges of emerging and flourishing technologies in retailing.

In the one hundred plus years since James Cash Penny opened his first “Golden Rule” store in the U.S., which grew to be today’s “J. C. Penny” stores, the retail world has changed drastically and immeasurably. His motto of “Honor, Confidence, Service, and Cooperation,” is still relevant today, and unlike many retailers, almost forty years after his death, JCPenny is flourishing and operating over 1,100 stores world-wide. The more recent story of Sam Walton is equally inspiring.

It is no longer James and Sam’s retail world! Retailers are challenged by changes in customers, completion, cultures, global reach, value-chain operations/options, and the enormous impact of technology. Seemingly invincible Wal-Mart stays current with amazing real-time inventory data-base practices that were unthinkable when Sam opened his first store.

This up to date collection of observations by a multinational body of seasoned researchers and practitioners focuses on three major pieces of the new retail world: specific advances in available technologies, new sources and applications of consumer based knowledge, and the impact of these technology and knowledge advances on the behavior of consumers. The contributions in this edited work come from scholars whose home bases are in Italy, Spain, UK, Croatia, Switzerland, Denmark, USA, Canada, Germany, and Cyprus, but whose experience and research have no national boundaries. Like the authors, the applications described are not limited by national borders but are relevant wherever the value chain of contemporary retailing exists—from Peoria to Paris.

My personal observations are related to the way these technological approaches become intertwined with the strategies of the retailers wherein they are to be applied. First, readers must not lose sight of the necessity of technological leaders to communicate and persuade top managers to consider the value of new options, and the willingness and ability of the owners to fund these important new technologies. Wal-Mart invested billions on its point-of-sale data-base system that allows vendors and corporate managers to access broadly into the current status of local stores and their customer base. Acquiring a lasting strategic advantage is the goal of the technologies, and investors must be convinced that there is a rational basis for the necessary investments.

Second, the obvious implication of the value of this book is that the basic facts of change are changing. Years ago, I told business students that within 20 years they would be managing jobs and products in companies whose products didn’t then exist. They did not believe it then and thought it was ridiculous. They do now! Yet, to make the same observation today would be ridiculous. Instead of twenty years, I would have to say five years. Thus is the source of the dynamics and excitement of this book. Retailers have become leaders and change agents, and are no longer simply merchandisers from the warehouses of established practices, but the creators of new and better, not just best, practices. The value-chain vehicle
begins where the fabrics of retailing originate to the end users and beyond. Now retailers must offer customer service that often times includes obsolescence protection and buy-back options. The technologies necessary to lead, and even keep up with, the process and mechanisms of the new applications in marketing must themselves evolve. And the research on the consumers must continuously grow and keep up.

Third, marketing technology and strategy are facing a major new constraint: sustainability. Corporate strategy is evolving to acknowledge the need to be part of a sustainable world future, and marketing should take a major lead in that new normalcy. My business students’ of years ago would have not believed that the issue of sustainability should have any role in marketing or corporate strategy. But they do now!

Fourth, this technology should not be for the retail giants such as IKEA or Carrefour, but should be developed in such a way as to encourage wide-spread diffusion into various marketing segments for small firms as well as large firms, developing nations as well as economically advanced nations, entrepreneurial enterprises as well as well established corporate firms, industrial firms as well as consumer oriented firms, and so forth. Widespread diffusion of new knowledge will happen when these applications are published in widespread outlets of technical information, not just scholarly journals. It is in this sense that I congratulate the authors and publishers of Advanced Technologies Management for Retailing.

Fifth, the future starts soon, and new hardware, software, and amazing new applications will come with increasing frequency. As developer and techno-entrepreneurs become more youthful, social media plays a larger and larger role in marketing applications, and the authors of these pieces become the established leaders in this exciting field, the world will be depending on this gravitas for mentoring and monitoring the values and ethics of this field. Computers are becoming much faster, and storage capacities are growing, and so are the information sources on the Internet alone, to say nothing of electronic data collection at point-of-sale is bordering on a level of privacy violation that seems uncontrollable. In his recent book Contemporary Issues in Ethics and Information Technology, Bob Schultz concluded that “Since ethical problems of IT confront us with new situations that cannot be handled in the same way of familiar cases, the only constant is the principles behind the cases.” And then adds that the higher level principles regulate the conflicts between lower level principles. My concern is that our marketing advances in IT are the work of people who have less and less interest, education, or incentive to worry about ethical issues. Therefore, I urge the authors and readers of this work to use your leadership to maintain clear standards of ethical practices in this important field.

I believe that Advanced Technologies Management for Retailing provides many contributions to the scholarly and practical world of contemporary retailing, where the consumer must remain the focus and the marketing mix remains enhanced, but unbroken.

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Robert Bjorklund has degrees from the University of Sioux Falls and the University of Massachusetts, but his interest in retail marketing began in at an early age in the shoe business. His general business management and academic skills developed later, over a period of over forty years while his career moved between business (marketing, strategy, and human resources) and academia. After completing his PhD, he served as Assistant Professor at the Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Massachusetts and later as Associate Professor at the State University at NY in Utica. Shifting to business practice, he joined Hay Associates, in New York was hired by a client as VP of a consumer products manufacturer and later as VP Marketing in commercial real estate in New Jersey. He then returned to teaching at Rider University and New York University. Currently, Bjorklund is Associate Professor of Management and chair of the Management Department in the School of Business at Woodbury University in Burbank, CA. His current research interest is bank trustee boards and the success or failure of American bank members of the FDIC.