

Foreword

The past year has been traumatic for businesses and customers alike. The world recession has been felt among all countries and businesses, and it is widely regarded as the worst since the Great Depression of 1932/3. Retailers worldwide have recorded a drop in demand, many have cut back on operations, expansion plans have been put on hold and unemployment has escalated to record proportions. The USA has been especially hard hit and recovery plans by the government are not showing the expected returns.

In South Africa the recession has also cut hard and deep, and retail sales showed a decline of more than 6% in real terms in the last quarter. Interest rates have been cut but the effect as such has as yet not been totally felt in the economy. The government is trying to stimulate the economy in various ways and it is hoped that these actions will lead to an increase in demand for products.

It can be expected that the next 12 to 18 months will be crucial for economic survival for many businesses, and that the types of services and products being offered in the marketplace will change to meet the challenges posed by the changing economic landscape.

In order to survive, retailers will have to look at new and better ways of marketing. The trend, it would seem, is to go back to the basics. More and more businesses and particularly retailers are realising that the key to survival lies in meeting the needs of customers, and meeting customer service expectations. The types of products on offer, the prices and so forth are virtually the same, and the only differentiating aspect may be the quality of service.

As is the custom, the *International Retail and Marketing Review* aims to keep its readers up to date on trends by publishing thought-provoking articles and research, as well as presenting new perspectives from leading scholars and thinkers within the field.

This May/June 2009 issue includes one international article, which deals with the effects of different elements of the web experience on the buying behaviour of virtual consumers.

We have also included two South African articles, the first one of which reviews customer-based brand equity across South African hotels by taking the dimensions of brand equity and comparing the differential effect that these have on brands within three hotel categories (low, medium, and high priced) in South Africa. The second article evaluates the usability of an academic marketing and retail department's website from the student's perspective.

We look forward to a stimulating and healthy debate from eminent scholars and business leaders worldwide, and we are very fortunate to have a number of esteemed academics from all over the world on our editorial board.

Prof. M.C. Cant
Editor
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Prof. Michael C. Cant

Professor Michael Cant is the Head of Marketing and Retail Department at the University of South Africa (Unisa). In this position, his responsibility includes the development of staff; course design; the development of new modules/courses and degrees; and liaison with the business community to ensure that all qualifications are in line with the specific needs of the business world. He acts as promoter for both master's and doctoral students. He is the chairperson of the Departmental Marketing

Committee of Unisa, as well as a member of the Marketing Committee of the College of Economic and Management Sciences.

In 1999 a major retailer in Africa, MassDiscounters, sponsored a substantial amount of funds for the development of a BCom degree in Retail Management. This sponsorship has been utilised for research in the field of retailing and for course development, and to fund the Chair in Retail Management of which Prof. Cant is the incumbent. He secured these funds largely due to the fact that he and his staff members had been able to assist MassDiscounters, through the academic programmes offered by the Centre for Business Management, to train their employees and develop their own in-house programmes.

Unisa presented a merit award for research to Prof. Cant in 1998 and again in 2002. His research outputs include contract research and contributions to prescribed textbooks, either as editor or as an author. His research projects, which deal with student perceptions of certain academic matters, their attitudes towards specific components for the curricula, their needs, and so on, have been completed. He has also published a number of research articles in both local and international academic journals. Prof. Cant also serves on the board of the *Journal of Retail and Consumer Services*.