

Building business leaders in the retail sector

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The University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business (UCT GSB) has developed a new specialisation option designed to support retail managers in difficult economic times - especially those wanting to expand into Africa.



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To be a retailer in South Africa today is challenging. Over the past five years, retail sales growth has declined - from 6.1% in 2011 to 2.4% in 2014 - putting pressure on retailers to find new markets and tighten their operations.

The numbers have had many businesses eyeing up expansion opportunities - particularly into the rest of Africa. But, according to Geoff Bick, Professor of Marketing at the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business (UCT GSB) and one of the lecturers on the new Retail Management stream in the Postgraduate Diploma in Management Practice (PGDip) at the UCT GSB, expansion brings with it its own challenges.

"I think there are great opportunities for real expansion into Africa. The continent that was once written off is now seen as the continent of opportunity," he says.

But Bick warns companies to be aware of the need to be flexible and open to different ways of doing business.

"Even mega corporations like Coca-Cola found that they had to improvise their business model in densely populated areas of Ethiopia and Tanzania."

"Their delivery trucks couldn't get into the narrow streets in these areas and they had to devise a business model along micro distribution centre lines, where entrepreneurs employed individuals on scooters and motorcycles to deliver, sometimes one case at a time," he says.

Bick says this not only improved Coca-Cola's penetration in these markets and boosted sales, but also added to the company's social responsibility profile as jobs were created and entrepreneurship in these areas was boosted.

"This is the kind of innovation that retailers need to be prepared for if they want to expand in Africa. But as in all such ventures, not all businesses have the necessary management and leadership capacity to help them facilitate this," he says.

This need has paved the way for the UCT GSB to develop a new specialisation option as part of its Postgraduate Diploma in Management Practice. Bick says there is a lot of retail activity, especially in the Western Cape, where the head offices of many retailers are situated, and the school saw an opportunity to support this crucial segment of the economy - more directly.

"The benefit of this new specialisation stream is that this is not a purely retail management course. We are supporting retail managers within the context and mission of the UCT Graduate School of Business, which aims to help develop well-rounded business leaders for emerging market economies," he says.

The PGDip offers delegates traditional business management expertise coupled with a bigger focus on integrating different modules like marketing and business innovation. This opens the way for crucial insights into how various sectors, like accounting, finance and marketing, come together in a company.

The programme takes a systems-thinking and action-learning approach, a proven educational method developed successfully at the UCT GSB in other business education courses. Students implement knowledge in their workplaces in between modules via action learning projects. This means companies and organisations see immediate benefits from employees participating in the course - while individuals are able to witness how theories work in practice - a valuable educational tool.

The PGDip consists of three core modules in Values-Based Leadership, Building Business Acumen and Emerging Markets in Context, and then allows students to choose their specialisation from Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Wine Business Management, Business Acumen, Leadership in Health Care and Retail Management.

"The Retail Management stream then teaches additional expertise in retail, like internal operations, distribution, merchandising, customer service and inventory control. So an individual who comes out of the PGDip having done this specialisation is not someone who only did a retail course but someone who can be a business leader in the retail sector, understanding the broader business vision around sustainability and social responsibility and can do it in emerging markets," he says.

To find out more about the Postgraduate Diploma in Management Practice (PGDip) at UCT GSB contact 0860 UCT GSB (828 472) / admissions@gsb.uct.ac.za or visit www.gsb.uct.ac.za/PGDip

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