

Retailing & design: combining the best of both worlds

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In today's knowledge economies, the importance of lifelong learning for active professionals grows tremendously (Vanweddigen, 2009). Also in a traditional sector like retailing. Because of evolutions in the interplay between on- and offline stores and omni-channel retail, retailers need to follow up on these developments to remain competitive (Van Ossel, 2014). Looking at the current educational offer in Europe to professionals in the domain of retail, two perspectives are possible, i.e. the one of marketing, and the one of design. In the domain of retail and marketing, a varied offer of professional/executive programs exist, going from basic and more general introductions in retail marketing to more specialized programs such as fashion retailing. These programs are mainly aimed at marketers and focus on the store as a strategic instrument by means of which a brand can communicate and act with a (potential) customer in order to make the customer buy. In the domain of retail and design however, the current offer is much smaller. Especially programs that focus on the actual design of the store, and that link the different aspects of design in a retail setting such as a store lay-out, customer journey, and store atmosphere, are limited. Not only in the context of lifelong learning programs, this scarcity also holds for undergraduate and graduate studies. This study leads us to the identification of a particular opportunity in the educational offer by combining marketing and design in a retail context.

Figure 1 organizes the current educational offer (the paper will give a detailed overview). Based on our study of this offer, we see that retail marketing programs are primarily theoretically oriented from a marketing and consumer behavior angle, and limited insight nor skill building is offered in how to implement retail strategies into an actual store design. Retail design programs are more empirical and focused on the practice of design. So they are less focused on theory and rarely link to marketing strategies and consumer trends. As Figure 1 demonstrates, we see the opportunity in the void on the crossover of theory & practice, and retail design & marketing. Therefore, we plead for a combination as we believe that this offers a fruitful platform on which marketers, designer and retailers can learn with and from another. In this context we launched the master class Advanced Retail Design (ARD) in 2013.

The ARD master class targets experienced professional marketers, designers and retailers. The advantage of starting with a professional program instead of developing a graduate or undergraduate program first is that it benefits from the body of knowledge of participants in at least one of the disciplines. This way, we can combine the complementary strengths and weaknesses of these professional disciplines, realizing opportunities quicker.

ARD is unique in its setting, since it brings together academic knowledge that originates in two disciplines (i.e., two faculties at our university - faculty of Architecture and arts, Department of interior architecture; faculty of Business Economics, Department of Marketing and Strategy). ARD takes the best of both worlds, building upon academic and practical relevance. ARD combines (1) the state-of-the-art scientific knowledge coming from academics, with (2) the knowledge of practitioners and consultants and (3) the experience of retailers. Currently, ARD consists of seven evening sessions of three hours. After the retailer's testimonial, we conclude each session with a case in which we invite the participants to put theory into immediate practice.

In the paper we want to share our preliminary insights after two years of organizing ARD. As such, this paper will offer a benchmark for professional programs that combine academic retail marketing and retail design research with practical implementation. For the future, ARD will be the basis of an international master program. But today important lessons can be learned from offering it in the context where retail professionals apply the knowledge, insights and skills immediately.

Figure 1: visualization of retail design and marketing studies across Europe.



References

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