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SMALL BUSINESS

The Independent Retailer

Gary Davies and Kim Harris

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Foreword

Both Napoleon and Adam Smith have been credited with coining the label of a nation of shopkeepers for the British. The image such a description conjurs up is of a substantial proportion of the population donning striped aprons or dark suits each morning and rolling up the shutters on the front of a business that is their own. While retailing accounts for almost as large a proportion of the work-force today as it ever did, today's retail scene is not one dominated by the independent owner. A steady decline in the share of trade through the smaller enterprise could be extrapolated to the point where the multiple retailers account for almost all retail sales. But such an approach ignores the reality that the smaller business still accounts for over a third of turnover in an economic sector that is displaying above average growth. It ignores the reality that few multiple chains suddenly appear without first having been a single enterprise. Such is the dynamic, fast-changing and competitive nature of retailing that the future of retailing lies substantially in the hands of some businesses that are today no more than a good idea, flourishing in a small corner of the land. With ambition and some luck there will be the next generation of Body Shop, Tie Rack and Sock Shop, the new Laura Ashley and a Benetton or two. Michael Marks began in Leeds over a hundred years ago with a single market stall: such success is still possible today.

However, many small retailers have no such ambitions and seek only the objectives of profitable survival and the independence of owning and operating their own business. This book addresses both types of independent retail business, and examines small-scale retailing from the perspective of those who seek to grow and those who seek mainly to enhance what will be unlikely to become a multiple retail business.

Both share common problems. The competitive environment is changing. From an era of being able to compete by offering a broad

range of products and having a local presence, to one where a more precise business direction is essential. The 1980s saw the emergence and growth of niche retailing. The lessons of the success of niche retailing need to be learned and understood.

After placing the independent retail business into context, the book seeks to identify how best such organisations can compete. Later chapters deal with topics introduced earlier in greater depth. The book ends with a number of real-life case studies, selected to illustrate the authors' views and ideas, but also to allow the reader to come to his or her own conclusions on the best way forward for the independent retailer.

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