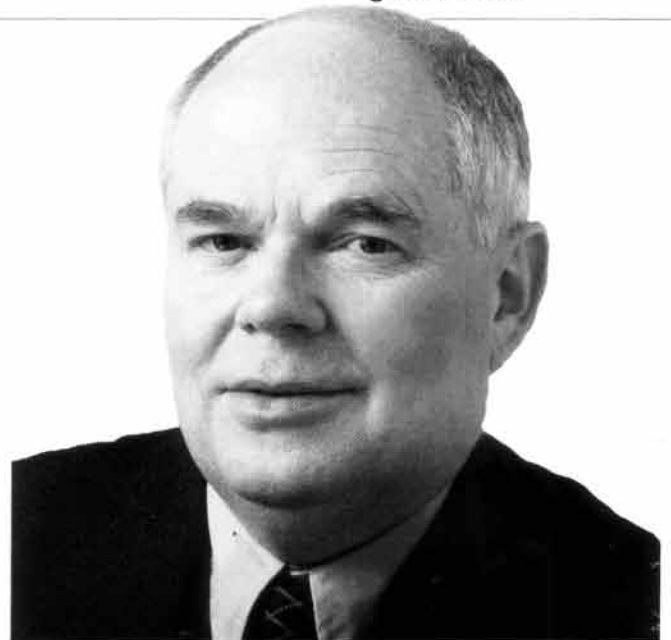


INDUSTRY PROFILE

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John Hoerner



In a retail career that stretches back to the 1950s, consultant and former CEO John Hoerner has run some of the biggest retail names on the high street. Here he explains what he's learnt and why he's decided to put all of the lessons into a new book, *How to Sell: Recipes for Retail*

RETAIL NEWSAGENT You have worked with dozens of major retailers over the decades. How do you analyse whether a business is successful or not?

JH The key thing you have to do when analysing a business is to forget about what kind of store it is, the people that work there, what they're trying to do and instead look at what they actually are doing. When I walk into a store I'm working with, I don't go in like I'm somebody from the head office, I go in like I'm a customer. I imagine that I've never been there before and ask myself questions: What do I think? What do I see? How is the store communicating to me?

RN What does a successful business look like?

JH People make businesses successful. Investing time and money in people is fundamental to the growth of any store. It amazes me how many retailers invest heavily in sourcing great products then try to skimp on the last and most important link with the customer - staff. Saving money on store staff below optimum levels is 'stepping over a pound to pick up a penny!' Whether you're a small or large store, staff need to be motivated.

RN You've had a very successful career yourself in retail. Can you tell us about it?

JH When I was at university in Lincoln, Nebraska in the late 1950s I took a job at a local department store, Hovland-Swanson, as a store supervisor in the dress department. When I graduated, my boss offered

me a permanent job. He told me that although I'd get lots of better offers, if I worked for him, in ten years' time I would be making more than anyone I know. That was a hard offer to refuse.

RN How did you come to work with so many British retailers?

JH I was running a retail chain in the US in the 1980s and we had a visit from the senior team at the Burton Group, which later became Arcadia. It was in trouble in the UK and looked at my stores and offered me a job to run one of its big department store chains, Debenhams. Since 2007 I have been a consultant for Tesco, mainly developing its clothing range in the UK as well as internationally.

RN Have you learned any surprising lessons about retail during your career?

JH Retailers love to talk about customer loyalty but, really, it doesn't exist. What retailers call

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What retailers call loyalty is actually customers feeling like they're getting a good deal

loyalty is actually customers feeling like they're getting a good deal. If a customer goes to Sainsbury's and keeps finding that the fruit and vegetables they're buying are rotten they won't just continue shopping there out of habit for long.

RN What would be your advice to retailers struggling to survive in an ever-changing retail landscape?

JH It's as simple as having the right stock available for your customers at all times. A prime example of this is when I tried to buy my wife a humidifier two years ago. I drove a long way to a retail park, spent nearly £5 on parking. I first went into Mothercare, and although the store had 27 different types of pushchairs, it did not have a humidifier. I then went to Boots, which had 127 different hair dryers, but not one humidifier. I was forced to go online and order it.

RN What made you want to write your recent book *How to Sell: Recipes for Retail*?

JH I've been really lucky in life to have a lot of help from people, who have coached and developed me. This book passes down every useful thing I've been taught and picked up on the way, written in a clear and simple format for anyone who works in or runs a retail business, from large chain stores to independent retailers. I concentrate on customers, buying and merchandising, stock management, how to deal with suppliers and how to motivate your staff.

★★ Company CV ★★

Author and retail consultant John Hoerner

Profile Into the seventh decade of his retail career, John Hoerner has done it all, starting out as a shop assistant and rising up to take the helm at major retailers including Debenhams and Harvey Nichols.

Latest news Mr Hoerner has put all of his insights and experiences into an easy-to-read book for the budding retail gurus of the future.

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