

# ADAPT AND PROSPER

*As brands take a global approach, demand is growing for individuals with an international focus*

Words Ian Williams



In an ever-changing world, is there anything more constant than change? This is true in most business sectors, but it's rarely more pronounced and faster than in retail. As Charles Darwin once expressed: "In the struggle for survival, the fittest win out at the expense of their rivals because they succeed in adapting themselves best to their environment."

Most commentators talk in terms of commercial change. Evolution and transformation are regular themes; positive changes to the challenges of recession in home markets, inflation in China, the price of cotton. Expansions, multichannel routes to customer, changes in manufacturing location and supply chain are some of the outcomes.

However, what does such change mean for an individual's career path? During any period of significant commercial change there is a rapid alignment in demand for certain skills, knowledge and experience. Although in today's climate, and particularly in Western economies, the number of vacancies is reduced, for those with the right skills, knowledge and experiences to suit the new commercial agenda, there is an ever-increasing demand.

As the new reality cuts across all disciplines, clear and careful planning and gathering of the right experiences throughout one's career path appear more critical than ever. Commercially, 'being on trend' and customer understanding are business-critical prerequisites for getting ahead. Correspondingly, the right mix of knowledge and experiences, gained within the right environment, could be regarded as career critical.

Greater international expansions and multichannel routes to market are central

change themes. Although neither is new, both appear far more significant today as retailers strive to satisfy ever-more sophisticated customers and to enhance profits from operations outside of national boundaries.

## International insight

This view is supported in a recent survey by KPMG, which found that 83% of retailers were looking to enter new geographic markets in 2011. Expansions involving own-store growth and various partnerships were particularly visible. The enhancement and integration of the multichannel approach underpins the 'new era of retail concept'. Such developments can be witnessed in most sectors, including the shift by some traditional wholesale brands into own-store retail on a bigger scale.

Conclusions from in-house research with several senior HR professionals, all with considerable European experience, provides an interesting insight into what today's changing commercial playing field will mean for the current and future demand for talent.

From those surveyed, there were some common messages. Traditionally, the fast-track route to the top was linked to an individual's talent and

“Those who have adapted their knowledge will be the ones to thrive and prosper

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experiences gained primarily from within a national market. Today, HR leaders suggest this is changing at an ever-increasing rate as the majority of domestic retailers grow outside the UK.

## Successful expansion

International expansion and the associated challenges that cut across most disciplines have changed the talent agenda, says Simon Dawson, former EVP HR at The Nuance Group. He adds, from a people perspective, that successful cross-border expansion results from a firm's willingness to appreciate, accept and adapt to cultural differences. Irrespective of discipline, those who have adapted and aligned their knowledge, commercial and cultural experiences to the new era will be the ones to thrive and prosper.

This view is supported by a growing number of vacancies with briefs to find applicants with international commercial, cultural and leadership experience. Mobility and a second language are also in demand despite English being the globally recognised business language.

Evidence suggests that individuals who possess the relatively unique knowledge and experience of working and living in international markets and have executed overseas growth are in growing and constant demand.

In the words of management expert Stephen Covey: "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you always got." The message is to adapt, align and prosper. ●

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