



EXPLORATIONS AND INSIGHTS

William R. Davidson (1919-2012): a pioneer in retailing

William R.
Davidson:
a pioneer

Brian Jones

School of Business, Quinnipiac University, Hamden, Connecticut, USA

537

Abstract

Purpose – This biographical sketch aims to describe the life and career of William R. Davidson.

Design/methodology/approach – The biographical research used in this study draws upon extensive personal interviews with the subject, on some archival research, and on extensive analysis of the subject's published scholarship.

Findings – Davidson fashioned a distinguished career as a scholar, teacher, and consultant in retailing management. The founding mission statement for his consulting firm, Management Horizons, included the ambition to “advance the frontier of knowledge in the distribution industries”. His tremendous success in that endeavour over a period of half a century earned William R. Davidson the recognition as a pioneer in marketing.

Originality/value – This article is adapted with permission from a chapter titled “William R. Davidson (1919): Mr Retailing”, in *Pioneers in Marketing*, published in 2012 by Routledge.

Keywords Retailing history, Biography, History of marketing thought, Management Horizons, William R. Davidson

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

William R. (Bill) Davidson's career in retailing management included over a half-century of significant achievements both in the academy and in industry. He was a member of the faculty at Ohio State University (OSU) for 25 years (1947-1972), during three of which he served as Chairman of the Marketing Department. He was elected President of the American Marketing Association in 1963. In 1964, he was elected to the “Hall of Fame in Distribution” at the Boston Conference for Distribution. In 1968, he co-founded Management Horizons (MH) which he then guided for more than 20 years as it became the largest retail consulting firm in the world. In 1970, he was named “Marketing Man of the Year” by the magazine, *Hardlines Wholesaling*. He is also listed in *Who's Who in America*. A doctoral fellowship in his name was established at OSU in 1993; and since 1995, the *Journal of Retailing* has annually presented the William R. Davidson Award to authors of the best article in that journal.

Chronologically, Davidson's career can be divided into two phases: the first as a teacher-consultant in the academic world, the second as a consultant-teacher in industry. Throughout that time, Davidson contributed to the marketing literature, writing and publishing over 40 articles, three monographs, and three books including best-sellers on marketing and retailing. Among his most significant contributions to marketing thought is his book titled *Retailing Management*, the first edition of which

This article is a shortened version of chapter nine, “William R. Davidson (1919): Mr Retailing”, in *Pioneers in Marketing*, adapted with permission.



was written while he was a faculty member at OSU (1953), the sixth and final edition published some 25 years later (1988) near the end of his tenure as Chairman of MH. One of his co-authors on three editions of that book, Daniel Sweeney, reviews *Retailing Management* in this issue of the journal.

Beginnings of a career in retailing

Growing up in Emporia, Kansas, Bill Davidson's parents operated a retail store known simply as "Davidson's". It was a full service grocery store and provided Bill with what he described as a "significant exposure to retailing" at an early age (Davidson, 1998). Working in the family store, he learned lessons about managing supply sources, credit management, customer service, pricing, and merchandise display. During high school, he added to that experience with a part-time job at the Emporia Market, a grocery store that was not in competition with his own family's business.

Davidson earned his way through a BA degree at the College of Emporia with part-time jobs at the Rainbow Bakery and as a stock person at F.W. Woolworth. At the bakery, he packaged bread and loaded delivery trucks. That taught him about the difficulties of matching supply with demand. He also found the scheduling and logistics of bread production and distribution fascinating. On weekends, he also occasionally rode in the delivery trucks with the bread salesmen to see what their jobs entailed. Graduating in 1940, he was offered a position in Woolworth's Emporia store as Assistant Manager.

He was amazed at Woolworth's ability to systematize thousands of stock keeping units across different seasons from suppliers all over the world and recalled performance expectations by the company and a discipline that are uncommon today (Davidson, 1998). Later, that discipline became an often cited lesson for his MH clients. Ironically, Woolworth later became one of those clients for Davidson's successful consulting firm.

After nine months at the Emporia store, Woolworth transferred Davidson to a much larger store in McPherson, Kansas. His store managers were mentors to him. Indeed, Woolworth had an official position for entry-level management trainees known as "learners". And even though Davidson officially joined the company above that rank, he still considered himself a learner and his managers as teachers. After a year, however, the budding career in retailing was put on hold. On December 7, 1941, Davidson heard on the radio about Pearl Harbor and as he later reflected, "that was the end of my Woolworth career" (Davidson, 1998).

His War experience raised a lot of questions about life choices for Davidson. On reflection he speculated that, had it not been for the war, he probably would have stayed at Woolworth and within three years would have had his own store (Davidson, 1998). Nevertheless, he did not return to "the five and dime". By the time the war was over, he had saved some money and under the GI Bill had earned four years of education benefits. The "learner" decided to return to school.

The marketing academy calls

During the war, Davidson met and later married his Navy payroll disbursement officer, Anne Anderson. Upon returning to the USA, the newlyweds stayed temporarily with Davidson's in-laws who suggested that he look into the MBA program at Washington



University (St Louis). Davidson's first choice was Harvard. However, while he had been accepted at Harvard, he would have had to wait a year-and-a-half for the backlog of war-interrupted students to clear. So, in 1946, he enrolled at Washington University.

The next year was a pivotal one for Davidson. As a graduate student at Washington University, he came under the mentorship of Professor Joseph Klamon, who taught marketing but who also did considerable consulting, including as an expert witness. This became a powerful career model for Davidson. Through Klamon, Davidson became involved with market research work for a St Louis advertising firm where he met Henry Whiteside, an executive in charge of market research. With Whiteside as a role model, Davidson was drawn to a career in market research which was then a rapidly growing field. For his MBA thesis, he chose to study newspaper consumer market research programs. Both Klamon and Whiteside told Davidson that to get anywhere in this field he should get his PhD and Klamon was particularly influential in Davidson's eventual selection of OSU's doctoral program in marketing.

Klamon's advice was typical of the graduate school selection process at that time. He suggested that Davidson choose a university where he might work under one of the "big guns" in marketing. In Klamon's opinion, during the late 1940s, there were still relatively few such schools, one of which was OSU. Ohio State had two big guns – Harold Maynard and Theodore Beckman; and in the Fall of 1947, Davidson began his doctoral program under their supervision. Just five years later, Davidson's name would appear along with the big guns on the cover of the fifth edition of their *Principles of Marketing* textbook.

The decision to do a PhD was intended as a step towards a career in market research. In 1947, Davidson was more interested in an office and salary like Henry Whiteside's than in the cubicle and stipend he earned as a teaching assistant. However, the War had created a huge demand for college education and universities were anticipating the coming flood of business undergraduates. Davidson's doctoral courses in marketing included over 30 students, half of whom (including Davidson) were already teaching. Without realizing it, he was soon immersed in an academic career. During his second year in the doctoral program, largely because of his experience at Woolworth, Davidson was asked by the Department Chairman, Harold Maynard, to teach a course in retailing.

His MBA had directed Davidson away from retailing towards market research as a field of interest. But that decision, in turn, led him to further graduate work, away from a career in industry towards an academic career. Eventually, these seemingly different roads would become paved over in a career that blended scholarship with practice, and retailing with market research.

Of course, Davidson's major in the doctoral program was in marketing; he also minored in finance. Several of his professors were influential, including Edward Smart in statistics, Charles Dice in finance, Robert Patton in economics, and Harold Maynard whose course on the history of marketing thought had a significant influence on Davidson. Maynard's personal familiarity with many of the pioneer scholars in marketing was fascinating to Davidson. The teacher developed in his student an appreciation of history which continued throughout the latter's career, most recently leading to his writing of *The History of Management Horizons* (Davidson, 1996)[1].

The required reading for the course on the History of Economic Thought was Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, which Davidson later felt was one of the most important books he ever read:

It had both a substantive impact on me but also had a literary flavor that is something else again [. . .]. There was a lot that I learned from that book. It was pleasurable reading [. . .] in a class by itself. The *Wealth of Nations* didn't deal with marketing in the sense of a modern day textbook, but dealt with marketing in a sense of the market, how the market is served, particularly with the price mechanism (Davidson, 1998).

Along with Daniel Dafoe's *The Complete English Tradesman*, it put marketing into a historical perspective and showed the young doctoral student how differently marketing was viewed during Adam Smith's time as compared with the twentieth century.

The most significant influence on Davidson early in his academic career, however, was wielded by Professor Theodore Beckman whose career and contributions to the marketing discipline in general, and to the OSU Marketing Department in particular, are legendary (Jones, 2012). Maynard may have been a "big gun", but Beckman was, in Davidson's words, a "titan". Davidson described Beckman as a "formidable" and "ferocious" teacher who would lock the door to his classroom at the start of class [. . .]. "You didn't want to be caught unprepared" for Beckman's course (Davidson, 1992, 1998). In writing a term paper for that course, Davidson prepared so thoroughly that he discovered an error in the titan's *Principles of Marketing* textbook. That work resulted in an invitation for Davidson to help revise the fifth edition of *Principles of Marketing* (Maynard and Beckman, 1952), the best-selling textbook first authored by Maynard and Beckman in 1927.

Davidson worked diligently on that revision. At that time, there were few marketing principles texts that had been through multiple editions. He saw the assignment as a wonderful opportunity and was very pleased to be asked to work on the book even though his credit for that fifth edition was not as a co-author. Rather, the title page reads "With the assistance of William R. Davidson". He had been asked by Beckman to add considerable material, with the result that the book would have been over 1,000 pages in length. However, the publisher demanded it be reduced to 800 pages, so Davidson then had to make the necessary cuts. He admitted that he learned much about editing from Beckman during that assignment and was promoted to co-author on the sixth edition of *Principles of Marketing* in 1957.

The similarities between the careers of Theodore Beckman and William Davidson are surely more than just coincidence. Both served with distinction in the military, albeit in different World Wars. Both focused their intellectual curiosity on channels of distribution – Beckman with an emphasis on wholesaling, Davidson on retailing. Both had a deep appreciation of history – Beckman's stimulated by a course on the history of economic thought taught by M.B. Hammond at OSU, Davidson's from Maynard's course on the history of marketing thought. Both began teaching executive development early in their careers – Beckman at the request of his dean (James Hagerty) to teach at the National Association of Credit Men's Institute (NACM), Davidson at the request of his department chair (Harold Maynard) to teach executive training sessions on retailing for the National Association of Retail Dealers (NARDA). Both scholars went on to do extensive consulting and worked as expert witnesses, in part motivated by their executive development teaching. However, therein lay a



significant difference in their two careers as Davidson eventually left academic life for a full time career in the business world.

Shortly after Davidson's assistance with the fifth edition of the *Principles* text, Maynard approached him to work with another OSU faculty member, Paul Brown, in writing a retailing textbook. *Retailing Principles and Practices* was completed and published in 1953 (Davidson, 1953). The title was changed to *Retailing Management* which Davidson revised through six editions, well after he had left OSU to run MH, with some of his most interesting and important conceptual innovations appearing in those later editions. Ideas such as the "Geometry of Environmental Opportunity model", the "Institutional Life Cycle in Retailing", and the concept of "Core Versus Fringe Customers" were just a few that combined Davidson's university experience with MH consulting work and were disseminated through the *Retailing Management* textbook. The continued revision and publication of that book for almost 20 years after he left the academic world was, perhaps, the best example of Davidson's view of the relationship between consulting and teaching. Consulting was a form of teaching and he felt that it made him a better teacher.

When it came time for his doctoral dissertation, Davidson (1951) chose to study the "Use, productivity, and allocation of space resources in department stores". In those days, the usual process for arriving at a topic was for your supervisor to simply assign one, especially if your supervisor was Theodore Beckman. That did not happen in Davidson's case, however. In the course of his dissertation work, he learned a great deal about department stores and met some of the most important executives at some of the biggest stores in America. It opened doors and established contacts which were to play a significant role throughout the rest of Davidson's career. He later observed that his entire career could be traced either directly or indirectly to the work for his dissertation.

His career at OSU

Davidson liked teaching. Yet, like most of us, when he taught for the first time he was "scared silly" and "way over prepared" (1998). When he first taught retailing, a friend of his signed up for the course, sat at the back of the room, and gave Davidson signals as to how he was doing. Over time, his enjoyment of teaching grew and that led directly to his change in ambition from working in market research to becoming a university professor. He was also very good at writing. That was evident from his work on the fifth edition of the *Principles* textbook and from his revision of the *Retailing Management* text. So what began as a means of becoming an executive in marketing research quickly became an end in itself.

During the 1950s, Davidson established his reputation as a scholar and diversified his teaching skills. With his dissertation completed and on graduation in 1951, he was offered and accepted a position as Assistant Professor at OSU. The next year was his first on the *Principles* book and the year after saw the publication of the first edition of the *Retailing* text. A run of articles, published mainly in trade journals throughout the 1950s, broadly explored the topic of retail store profitability.

During the late 1950s, Marketing Department Chair, Harold Maynard, gave Davidson two major assignments that ultimately had a profound influence on the direction of the young faculty member's career. As mentioned previously, the NARDA had approached Maynard to offer through the university a one-week training program

on retailing for NARDA members. Maynard turned their request over to Davidson who thereby began a long involvement with executive training. At about the same time, the Ohio Manufacturers Association also contacted Maynard about a similar program. Those requests led the school to establish one of the earliest university executive development programs in America, under Davidson's leadership. The newly-promoted Associate Professor served as the program's first director from 1955 to 1958. That provided him with administrative experience which he would draw upon repeatedly throughout his career; and it diversified his teaching since increasingly his students were managers and executives rather than 20-year-old undergraduates.

Davidson enjoyed 1958-1959 as a Visiting Professor at Stanford University, where his reduced teaching responsibilities afforded much time for revising the *Retailing* book. It was a time for reflection and seemed to redirect his career somewhat. When he returned from Stanford to OSU in 1960, the completed manuscript for the second edition of *Retailing Management* was published. His articles began to appear in more scholarly journals. A highly productive relationship was struck with a new member of the marketing faculty, Alton Doody, who would eventually become Davidson's founding partner at MH.

During the next decade, Davidson added significant administrative service to his academic portfolio. Since 1954, he had been active in the executive of the American Marketing Association (AMA), serving as chairman of the committee on the teaching of marketing, later as vice president of the Education Division, and in 1963, as president of the AMA. As a leader in the marketing academic community, Davidson seemed to become more reflective and critical of the discipline.

The early 1960s saw fundamental and significant changes occurring in collegiate business education including marketing. In 1959, two landmark studies of business education were published by the Ford and Carnegie Foundations (Gordon and Howell, 1959; Pierson, 1959). Both reports included harsh criticisms of the descriptive, vocational character of collegiate business education at that time and advocated an emphasis on behavioral sciences, quantitative methods, and managerial economics. Their impact on business school curricula was swift and enduring. It led to a period in the development of marketing education later described by Lazer and Shaw (1988) as one of "differentiation and legitimization". Davidson (1963) called it a marketing renaissance.

He used the term "renaissance" in the sense of a rebirth which called for a re-examination of the nature and purpose of marketing (Davidson, 1963). His own answer to that challenge (together with input from colleagues at OSU), was a philosophy of marketing education that went beyond the typical micro-management dimension and stressed the macro-social process of marketing. Davidson was concerned that the aggregate social impact of marketing activity was commonly underestimated, that marketing was more of a formative factor and less of an adaptive factor in society than was then suggested by many marketing professors and textbooks. He called for recognition of the roles played by influencers and interests other than consumers and of the formative, as well as the adaptive, aspects of marketing in society (1963). This broader perspective on marketing was certainly consistent with some aspects of the Foundation reports cited above. And it added the quality of a senior statesman to Davidson's image.

The first collaboration between Davidson and Doody also appeared in 1963, a paper in the *Journal of Marketing* about the future of discounting. That was followed by two articles in the *Harvard Business Review (HBR)* on small-scale retailing (Doody and Davidson, 1964), and on a revolution in retailing that the authors predicted would be driven by computers (Doody and Davidson, 1967). The latter was a fascinating prophecy that bore an uncanny resemblance to the internet commerce of today. Some readers were shocked; some laughed. Whatever the reaction, there was lots of it, as their paper sold the most reprints of any *HBR* article in 1967. Doody and Davidson also joined forces for the third edition of *Retailing Management* (Davidson *et al.*, 1966) and the two partners rapidly became big guns in the field of retailing. By 1968, they had formalized their consulting activities under the corporate name of MH.

It was curious then, in light of his growing reputation as an author and consultant that Davidson agreed in 1967 to serve as Chairman of the Marketing Department at Ohio State, a position he held for three years. That seemed to bring him to another crossroad in his career. At the conclusion of his term as Department Chair, he was being considered for the Dean's position at OSU as well as at other institutions. Did he want to take that next step up the academic ladder? One of the primary expectations of a dean was fund raising, which did not appeal to Davidson. And teaching undergraduates was becoming routine and losing its appeal. It was also becoming increasingly difficult to blend his consulting activities with his university responsibilities, not just because of the workload, but because of the changing attitude of academics towards consulting.

During the 1950s, consulting had been regarded as a "matter of high esteem", "something you put on your CV with pride" (Davidson, 1998). It was highly regarded by many in the academic community, considered as something that enhanced a professor's teaching and brought prestige to the university. While there had always been limits on how much one should do, there were many opportunities for consulting and to be well paid for that work. Perhaps because of that, some faculty members abused the situation. Whatever the reasons were, by the late 1960s, the attitude towards professor-consultants had predominantly changed to one of envy and resentment. With the growing success of MH, Davidson was faced with a choice.

In 1972, he decided to leave OSU and devote his full energy to making MH a success. However, that did not mean an end to teaching or scholarship. The teaching and the learning never stopped. It did, however, mean that Davidson would finally get that office and salary like Mr Whiteside's!

Advancing the frontier of knowledge – on a New Horizon

Before 1968, MH operated as an informal joint venture between Davidson and Alton Doody for consulting projects in which the two OSU colleagues were involved. MH was officially incorporated in 1968 with Davidson as Chairman and Doody as President of the rapidly growing consulting firm. By then, they had several large, important projects under way including the retraining of the entire National Cash Register Company's (NCR) sales organization to deal with new point-of-sale information technology and the opportunities it presented.

During this period, Davidson recruited several other academics to join the MH staff. Most were recognized experts in their fields and two later became Chairmen of MH. When MH was incorporated in 1969, its shares were issued equally to Davidson,

Doody, Bert C. McCammon, and NCR Vice-President Byron Carter. The most significant asset the company “owned” at that time was intellectual property – and it was considerable. In addition to Davidson and Doody, McCammon was a faculty member at Indiana University and a nationally recognized expert on retailing and distribution. Other notable academics were soon added to the MH staff including John Pfahl (Chair of the Finance Department at OSU and author of a textbook on corporate finance), Cyrus Wilson (PhD graduate of OSU; he became the second Chairman of MH after Davidson), David Kollat (OSU faculty member and author of a seminal textbook on consumer behavior), and Daniel Sweeney (PhD graduate of OSU, faculty member at the University of Tennessee, Director of Research at Dayton’s Department Store; he later succeeded Wilson as Chairman of MH)[2]. Their combined conceptual knowledge and experience permeated MH’s early consulting work, including the application of the marketing concept to retailing, competition among vertical marketing systems, the total profitability model, information technology in retailing, and non-store retailing, all of which were relatively new concepts or applications of concepts in 1968 (Davidson, 1993).

During the late 1960s, there were dramatic changes affecting retailing, changes that created tremendous opportunities for MH and laid the foundation for its success as a consulting firm. Two of the earliest and most important projects involved the NCR and the Associated Merchandising Corporation (AMC). NCR was well-known for its sales force and their ability to sell cash registers to retailers for the control of money in stores. However, changes in technology had created the opportunity, indeed the need, to capture data at the point of sale and the NCR sales force was on the verge of becoming obsolete. MH was hired by NCR to retrain their entire sales force of over 1,000 representatives. They developed a two-week educational program on retail marketing and financial strategy that incorporated the role of point-of-sale information. Much of the content of that program was actually based on content in the recently-published second edition of *Retailing Management* co-authored by Davidson and Doody. That NCR training program led MH to develop an expertise in information technology and to the formation of a subsidiary, Computer Horizons, later renamed MH Data Systems. Thus, the NCR training program provided an entry for MH into the growing field of retail management information systems.

A common theme throughout their consulting projects during the late 1960s was the application of information technology to retail and wholesale distribution. It was, as suggested in the title of Doody and Davidson’s (1967) *HBR* article, the “Next revolution in retailing”, except that the revolution was already underway and most retailing executives were unprepared to defend themselves. Thus, one of the most important client services during the late 1960s and into the early 1970s was what Davidson called executive briefing programs. They were typically sponsored by a cooperative group, trade association, or some loosely organized group of firms, in order to fund the background research that provided much of the content for the programs and to make the programs affordable for individual companies. Such programs were developed for a variety of industries, none more important to MH than department stores. The AMC was a cooperative organization of 25 leading single-outlet department stores in North America; and during the late 1960s, MH developed a series of conferences and executive development programs for the AMC. Those programs were based on what Davidson called the “Geometry of Environmental Opportunity Model” that suggested

department stores were in the maturity stage of their institutional life cycle and would decline if they did not adapt to changes in consumer markets, in retail competition, and in supplier or resource markets. Davidson told them that single-unit department stores, such as those in the AMC, were becoming obsolete. Not surprisingly, those ideas were considered radical to store owners, including one prominent Columbus retailer who told Davidson he was “full of shit” (Davidson, 1998). That department store was later swallowed up by the Federated Department Stores group.

Executive development was the flagship product of MH’s client services during its early days, again illustrating that Davidson never stopped teaching. As he later observed:

[...] my consulting work [at Management Horizons] was teaching business people, enhancing the knowledge of whole industries. At Management Horizons, for the most part, the people in the audience were there because it related to what they did and they were interested in improving it [...] [and] the interest level was much higher than the average undergraduate class in a business school, particularly in dealing with required basic courses where the student would rather be doing something else (Davidson, 1998).

As a result of that emphasis on teaching, MH added to its reputation as an intellectual leader in retail consulting.

As an extension of their executive briefing programs, in 1974, MH launched a syndicated client service known as the Retail Intelligence System (RIS). It consisted of various publications and annual conferences designed to provide retailers with information resources about company and industry performance. The RIS publications included the *Retail Yearbook* of industry sector baseline studies, *Retail Preview* addressing planning issues for soft goods, home goods, and consumables, *Intelligence Update* focusing on industry and company financial performance, and the *Retail Economist* providing a macro perspective on economic and political trends likely to affect retailers. A complete set of these publications from the inception of the RIS is archived as part of the Bass Business History Collection at the University of Oklahoma and is continually updated following a six-month lag from the time clients have received the information. The RIS was considered a significant part of MH’s intellectual property and goodwill to Price Waterhouse when it purchased MH in 1985 (Davidson, 1996, p. 6).

As the RIS was being developed, Davidson became more active in litigation consulting. It is tempting to speculate that Joseph Klamon and Theodore Beckman, both of whom were Davidson’s teachers and both of whom were very active as expert witnesses, had some influence in that regard. More likely, however, Davidson was in demand as an expert witness because of his consulting experience. Davidson worked in that capacity during the 1970s in a series of cases dealing with the concept of “relevant market” for department stores. Not surprisingly, most of his litigation consulting work was for department stores and much of it included testifying in cases involving charges of antitrust and unfair competition practices. That work also continued well after Davidson had left full time employment with MH in 1990. After leaving MH, Davidson continued work as a consultant from time to time. He passed away in December 2012.

By the time it was merged into Price Waterhouse in 1985, MH had become the largest retail consulting firm in the world with offices in London, Paris, Frankfurt, Milan, and Madrid. Davidson continued for five years as Chairman of the MH “division” and retired from full time work there in 1990. In reflecting on the tremendous

growth and success of MH over those 20-plus years, Davidson (1998) remarked, “We were in a time of rapidly changing conditions which we understood and most [retail] practitioners did not”.

Conclusion

William R. Davidson’s life in retailing management began during the 1930s with his family’s grocery store in Emporia, Kansas and continued through a distinguished academic career and as a retailing management consultant well into the twenty-first century. Through one of his MBA instructors, Joseph Klamon, he was attracted to the growing field of market research and to consulting, both of which were later blended with his interest and expertise in retailing management. Klamon also steered Davidson to doctoral studies at OSU where he was strongly influenced by Theodore Beckman and Harold Maynard. Beckman nurtured Davidson’s interest in retailing, supervised his dissertation on that topic, and was another role model for integrating consulting with teaching and research. As a teacher, Maynard stimulated Davidson’s appreciation for history. As the Department Chair of Marketing at OSU, he opened the door for Davidson to become involved in executive development and to write what became the leading textbook on retailing management. Davidson (1960) felt that his second edition of that book was his most significant contribution to the marketing literature. His *HBR* article, “Next revolution in retailing” (Doody and Davidson, 1967) was prophetic and a shocker to many industry observers. Another *HBR* article, “The retail life cycle” (Davidson *et al.*, 1976), reflected his strong belief in the life cycle metaphor and was used extensively in his consulting.

Davidson entered academic life at a unique time in the history of business education – a time when there was exploding demand for education, knowledge and expertise, and little supply of the same. Those conditions presented tremendous opportunities and Davidson capitalized on them. Similarly, he entered the retail consulting business at a time when there were enormous changes in retail markets and retailing practice driven by technology. It was a revolution and he was one of the leaders in the development of new ideas about retailing management. His contributions to our conceptual understanding of marketing became, perhaps, even more significant during his tenure at MH through his leadership in the development of models such as the Geometry of Environmental Opportunity model, the model of Institutional Life Cycle in Retailing, and the concept of Core and Fringe Customers. Even then, however, he was more concerned with learning and teaching how institutions adapted to changing conditions than he was with principles or models.

Davidson fashioned a distinguished career as a scholar, teacher, and consultant in retailing management. The founding mission statement for MH included the ambition to “advance the frontier of knowledge in the distribution industries” (Davidson, 1996). His tremendous success in that endeavour over a period of half a century earned William R. Davidson the recognition as a pioneer in marketing.

Notes

1. Davidson’s own *History of Management Horizons* is reviewed in this issue by Robert Tamilia.
2. Daniel Sweeney also became a co-author of Davidson’s book, *Retailing Management*, and provides an historical review of that book in this issue.



References

- Davidson, W.R. (1951), "Use, productivity, and allocation of space resources in department stores", unpublished PhD dissertation, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH.
- Davidson, W.R. (1960), *Retailing Management* (with Paul Brown); *Retailing Management*, 3rd ed., 1966 (with A.F. Doody and P. Brown); *Retailing Management*, 4th ed., 1975, Ronald Press, New York, NY (with A.F. Doody and D.J. Sweeney); *Retailing Management*, 5th ed., 1984 (with D.J. Sweeney and R.W. Stampfl); 6th ed., 1988, Wiley, New York, NY.
- Davidson, W.R. (1963), "Marketing renaissance", in Greyser, S. (Ed.), *Toward Scientific Marketing*, American Marketing Association, Chicago, IL, pp. 3-14.
- Davidson, W.R. (1992), interview with the author, Columbus, OH, June 24.
- Davidson, W.R. (1993), "Management Horizons, Division of Price Waterhouse, 25th Anniversary Key Note Speaker (notes)", unpublished document, Columbus, OH.
- Davidson, W.R. (1996), *The History of Management Horizons*, Management Horizons, Columbus, OH.
- Davidson, W.R. (1998), interview with the author, Columbus, OH, August 10-11.
- Davidson, W.R. and Brown, P. (1953), *Retailing Principles and Practices*, Ronald Press, New York, NY.
- Davidson, W.R., Bates, A.D. and Bass, S.J. (1976), "The retail life cycle", *Harvard Business Review*, November-December, pp. 89-96.
- Davidson, W.R., Doody, A.F. and Brown, P. (1966), *Retailing Management*, 3rd ed., Wiley, New York, NY.
- Doody, A.F. and Davidson, W.R. (1964), "Growing strength in small retailing", *Harvard Business Review*, July-August, pp. 69-79.
- Doody, A.F. and Davidson, W.R. (1967), "Next revolution in retailing", *Harvard Business Review*, May-June, pp. 4-21.
- Jones, D.G.B. (2012), *Pioneers in Marketing*, Routledge, New York, NY.
- Lazer, W. and Shaw, E.H. (1988), "The development of collegiate business and marketing education in America: historical perspectives", in Shapiro, S. and Walle, A. (Eds), *Marketing: A Return to the Broader Dimensions*, American Marketing Association, Chicago, IL, pp. 147-152.
- Maynard, H.H. and Beckman, T.N. (1952), *Principles of Marketing*, Ronald Press, New York, NY.

About the author

Brian Jones is Editor of the *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing*. He also serves on the editorial review boards of the *Journal of Marketing Management*, *Marketing Theory*, *Journal of Macromarketing*, and *European Business Review*. His research focuses on the history of marketing ideas and has been published in the *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *Journal of Marketing Management*, *Journal of Macromarketing*, *Marketing Theory*, *Journal of International Marketing*, *Psychology & Marketing*, *Canadian Journal of Administrative Science*, *Accounting History*, *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing*, and other publications. He is co-editor, with Mark Tadajewski, of the (2008) three-volume set of readings titled *The History of Marketing Thought*, and author of (2012) *Pioneers in Marketing*. Brian Jones can be contacted at: Brian.Jones1@quinnipiac.edu

To purchase reprints of this article please e-mail: reprints@emeraldinsight.com
Or visit our web site for further details: www.emeraldinsight.com/reprints

Reproduced with permission of copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.