MKTG 890
Retail Ecosystem Action Learning Projects

Fall 2019 | Location TBD

Class Time  M/W 1:30 p.m. to 3 p.m.

Typically, when we have sessions of the entire class, they are held on Mondays, so please keep this time clear on your calendars. On Wednesdays, teams will meet with Prof. Robertson and TA, Greta O’Brien during class time for individual project updates or at other times that are mutually convenient.

Instructor  Professor Thomas S. Robertson, 769 JMHH
            robertson@wharton.upenn.edu

Teaching Assistant  Greta O’Brien, mobr@wharton.upenn.edu

Course Coordinator and Assistant to Prof. Robertson  Michele Anna Klekotka, klekotka@wharton.upenn.edu
            Tel: (215) 898-9410

Canvas Site

Description

This course offers Wharton MBAs an opportunity to work on real-world projects for companies in the retail industry and in the wider retail ecosystem. It requires the exploration and analysis of actual business issues or opportunities identified by sponsoring/client companies, as well as the formulation of recommendations. It combines 1) academic study/components, 2) application of prior business knowledge/skills to the project, and 3) a solutions-oriented consulting mentality.

In addition to supervised project work and regular updates to the corporate client/project sponsor, the course involves some classroom meetings and discussions on topics pertaining to the projects. While this course focuses on marketing topics, some projects might also touch on topics from related disciplines such as operations, management of innovation & technology, data analytics, and international management. The focus is much more on application of concepts than the learning of new concepts.
Learning Objectives

The real-world oriented nature of this course provides an opportunity to study retail business challenges and to apply academic knowledge, together with prior experience. The course contributes to enhancing students’ preparation for retail- and consulting-related careers, as well as entrepreneurial ventures.

Specifically, students will study timely retail topics and work on an actual retail project, which will provide an opportunity to learn how to structure a retail business problem, develop a problem-solving project plan, collect and analyze relevant information, and make recommendations of value to management. Ultimately, the project must be judged by the company to be worthwhile and to have suggested actionable recommendations.

Prerequisites

Students should have completed MKTG 611 (Marketing Management). Some background in retailing or the MKTG 725 (Principles of Retailing) course is useful.

Overview

MKTG 890 is a 1.0-credit course conducted on a team basis, combining project work with a number of formal classroom meetings. Working on projects for leading companies in the retail industry and in the wider retail ecosystem, students will analyze real-world business issues and suggest recommendations to the client/sponsoring company. Each student is expected to spend an average of 4-5 hours each week on project work.

Project Topics & Sponsors

Farfetch

**Topic**: The “New” Luxury Goods Groups

**Description**: The modern personal luxury goods landscape is dominated by a handful of large groups that utilize a variety of strategies to establish and maintain market share across the industry. Groups like Kering (f. 1963), LVMH (f. 1987) and Richemont (f. 1988) have gone from strength to strength building across a diverse portfolio of brands, categories and retailers, while within specific categories, groups like Esteé Lauder (f. 1946), Diageo (f. 1997) and Puig (f. 1914) have developed strength through consolidation within a specific industry vertical. Within the last decade, new groups including Farfetch (f. 2008) and New Guards Group (f. 2015) have emerged on the scene leveraging different strengths and strategies to emerge as players on a global scene.
Objective: Participants in this project will be encouraged to explore and define what the key attributes (in terms of resources, skills, values, leadership, etc.) will be for the most successful luxury groups of the future in the midst of a sea of change in technology, consumers and competitive forces. Thoughts on the topic of strategically important areas of corporate development would be welcomed and encouraged. The findings and suggestions might be used by the Strategy Team and Investment Committee of Farfetch.

Deliverables: Final presentation and potentially short-listed investment areas/opportunities

Available company data: Publicly available financial data, quarterly earnings transcripts, access to Farfetch executives to interview in the research phase

Project Advisors
- Jeffery Fowler – President, Farfetch North America
- Terence Chu – Head of Commercial Finance & Marketplace Growth, Farfetch North America

Spencer Gifts

Topic: Spencer's eCommerce Business Strategy

Description: Essentially, the premise is that Spencer's is an iconic successful lifestyle retailer of trend-right merchandise across a range of accessory categories. We are focused on and identify a core customer (Nikki and Jack) 18-24, free-spirited and confident. Spencer's speaks to them in their voice. We are accessible and equal-opportunity. Our core categories are fairly equally divided between 1) apparel (really t-shirts and therefore more like accessories), 2) accessories, 3) jewelry, 4) intimate, 5) humor and 6) décor. We operate in the zeitgeist between pop culture, sub-culture, underground and nostalgia.

Spencer's mission statement, "Life's a party, we're makin’ it fun" defines our brand. The essence is the store which presents an eclectic set of categories, products and story-telling to surprise and delight the customer. While they love to come to Spencer's to see what we are doing, the purchase intent is based on want not need.

Objective: On the one side we have this youthful, trend-oriented business that feeds off culture and media, but the experience is very much a treasure hunt in the four walls. As such, our ecommerce sales penetration at Spencer's is well below industry standards and at 3% of sales is below expectations. Here are the questions:

1. Are we completely missing the boat?
2. Did we nail it because that is the extent of the opportunity despite all of the hype around ecomm potential?
3. Is there a competitor (or competitive set) out there who is smarter than us, and if so why?
4. Is anyone making money, especially after marketing costs, free shipping and promotions?
Spencer’s ecommerce business strategy is early stage. We seem to be missing signals looking for more traction. Help us figure it out. Do more, do less or stay the course?

**Deliverable:**

**Available company data:**

**Project Advisor:** Steven Silverstein, CEO

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**Blueland**

**Topic:** Go-to-market strategy for new category launch

**Description:** Blueland is a new consumer brand reimagining conventional personal care and cleaning products to be more convenient, lower priced and better for the environment. We’ve developed a wide range of products in innovative formats (e.g., toothpaste tablets, soap sheets, spray cleaner refill tablets) that obviate the need for plastic packaging but also make traditional CPG products over 300x smaller, 200x lighter and 30x cheaper to ship. We are launching in spring 2019, we are venture backed and have an exciting group of investors including game-changing founders to celebrities

**Objectives:** Outline an overall strategy connected with broader business goals for new category launch leading into holiday

Develop tactical execution-related recommendations with associated budget, estimated returns and suggested creative assets, e.g. microinfluencer strategy with core influencers outlined / expected budget, press pitches on product innovation, etc.

**Deliverables**

- Overall project plan for category launch
- Weekly 360 marketing plan with associated spend and ROAS assumptions
- Creative briefs for execution across core marketing channels (digital marketing, site, social)
- Secondary research and quantitative and qualitative primary research with consumers (category insights, user testing, pricing analytics, etc.

**Available company data:**

**Project Advisor:** Gina Pak, CEO
Saks Fifth Avenue

**Topic:** Personalization and Artificial Intelligence for Saks Fifth Avenue

**Description:** HBC is a diversified retailer focused on driving the performance of high quality stores and their omnichannel platforms and unlocking the value of real estate holdings. Founded in 1670, HBC is the oldest company in North America. HBC’s portfolio today includes formats ranging from luxury to premium department stores to off price fashion shopping destinations, with over 300 stores and about 40,000 employees. HBC's leading businesses across North America include Saks Fifth Avenue, Hudson's Bay, Lord & Taylor, and Saks OFF 5TH.

**Objective:** Saks Fifth Avenue and Hudson’s Bay are both on a journey to disrupt the retail industry by truly personalizing the end-to-end customer experience. For each business, we’ve identified a set of priority customer use cases across three key personalization pillars: product, experience and value. As part of this transformation, we need to evaluate HBC’s capabilities to determine where we need to build, borrow, and buy in order to achieve our short term and long term goals. The objectives of this project will be to:

1. Evaluate the various personalization and artificial intelligence companies in the marketplace
2. Develop the strategic and financial business case for the providers that are best aligned with Saks Fifth Avenue and Hudson’s Bay’s personalization goals

**Deliverable:**

**Available company data:**

**Project Advisor:** Carolyn Li, VP Personalization and Marketing Acceleration

New World Diamonds

**Topic:** Large scale brand and product awareness across the USA.

**Description:** For those who want more and expect better, New World Diamonds is the smarter way to buy a diamond. New World Diamonds respects that its customers already know what they want to celebrate, and empowers people to express themselves—in any way they see fit—through accessibly priced, one-of-a-kind diamonds. More considerate of your wallet and the world, New World Diamonds’ high-quality, lab-grown diamonds are a purchase you can feel good about—keeping the focus on you and your milestone.

A diamond is a celebration. That’s what the traditional diamond industry has been saying for a century—and they’re not wrong. Diamonds are beautiful, and strong symbols of important milestones. But the industry is often shortsighted, usually exclusive and more than a little self-important. They make buying more complicated (and expensive) than it needs to be, and try to dictate how and when diamonds should be used, so customers feel like they don’t have many options.
New World Diamonds knows there is a better way to buy diamonds, because there is a better way to make them—one that is more conscious and more creative, and one that allows you to get more, within any budget. And New World Diamonds knows that people are smart. Customers take the time to decode and decide what they want before they set foot into a physical store—if they ever do. And they think about their purchases in a bigger way—evaluating how they fit not only in the grander scheme of their lives, but within the world as a whole. They want and expect more.

We want to show you all the possibilities of a smarter diamond—from unique shades to more carats for your money. And we want you to have fun with the possibilities—celebrating any milestone that’s authentic to you with a one-of-a-kind diamond. We make a smarter diamond for those who know what they love.

**Objective:** Our objective is to work with the students in crafting communication and advertising strategies that identify white space in which New World Diamonds can place it’s content in channels which are contextually relevant. When we think about brands like Citi (sponsorship of “Citi” Bikes in NYC) or Lego (the acclaimed Lego movie) the brilliance of their brands being positioned in the manner which they were in the two examples above is what we need to think through (on a smaller scale and budget) for NWD. I would like to work with the class to develop a plan for NWD that will set us apart from the competition and allow for large scale brand and product awareness to happen across the USA.

**Deliverable:**

**Available company data:**

**Project Advisor:** Jacques Paris, Founder

**Course Requirements**

Regular interaction among team members as well as with Prof. Robertson, Teaching Assistant Greta O’Brien and corporate partners is expected. Each team will deliver a project proposal, midpoint presentation, final presentation, and an executive brief. Due dates can be found in the detailed summary within this syllabus.

This is an action learning course. Project teams are expected to deliver actionable recommendations to their corporate client/sponsor. Team meetings with Prof. Robertson are scheduled weekly for project updates—usually during the scheduled class time on Monday or Wednesday. Teaching Assistant Greta O’Brien is also available to meet with Teams. Sponsors are asked for their input and can have an impact on the final grade for the team.
Teams

Each team will consist of 5-6 graduate students who will be assigned by Prof. Robertson after gaining student preferences and resumés in late August. The background composition of each team will be considered to match the needs of the project. Since projects may require a range of skill sets, diverse project teams are desirable.

Each team will select a liaison to the client to be the single point of contact with the sponsor/client. This responsibility includes communicating with the sponsor/client, receiving questions, comments, direction from the sponsor/client, sharing it with the other team members, and arranging meetings and conference calls with the client.

Assessment

Team members can expect to receive a similar grade for the course but based on peer evaluation a lower grade (or ever so occasionally a higher grade) may be appropriate.

The grade components of the course are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Final Output</td>
<td>65%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proposal and Midpoint Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team Peer Evaluation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Company Evaluation of Project</td>
<td>10%</td>
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</table>

Program Notes

**Kick-Off Meetings or Calls.** Kickoff discussions with the Sponsors should be held at the very beginning of the course. The Sponsor will provide background, project objectives and requirements, and deliverables followed by Q&A. Tom and Greta will join these calls if possible.

**Proposal (by Sept. 23rd).** The team will develop a proposal to include scope of work, process, agreed objectives, and deliverables. The team should identify key questions and issues, develop several hypotheses, and propose a set of methods and timeline of activities (e.g., surveys, interviews, and library research). A budget is also required to the sponsor. It is imperative to make your document/data requests to the company on or before Sept. 23rd.

**Midpoint Progress Presentation (Oct. 14th).** Each team will give one or two mid-point presentations to fellow classmates and to their Sponsor. The presentations should reflect accomplishments to date and plans for completion. Specifically summarize the preliminary recommendations you have formulated for the project sponsor. Although the recommendations are still subject to change as the final pieces of data are gathered and analyzed, it is important to inform your project sponsor of the directions you are taking.
Final Presentation and Executive Brief. Each team will provide a formal final presentation of its project. Sponsors may require the submission of additional files, such as a memo about the key findings. An “Executive Brief” is required as part of the course. This brief is to be no more than two pages. It must include:

Statement of the problem;

- Identification of the process/approach followed by the team;
- Solution alternatives
- Key recommendations to client
- Justification

Interaction with the Project Sponsor. Each project will have a client contact at the sponsoring company – a person responsible for providing data and other necessary information. The Team Liaison is expected to interact with the client contact on a weekly basis to ensure that the team’s work is addressing the company’s proposed issues.

Generally, presentations are expected to take place on campus or be conducted via video conference if an in-person meeting is not feasible. In the case of travel, students will be reimbursed for approved expenses by the sponsoring company as part of your proposed budget.

Project Sponsor Evaluations. Team evaluations will be sought from the sponsors of your project and account for 10% of the grade in the course. The sample evaluation form is attached.

Team Peer Evaluations. Prof. Robertson also will seek evaluations from each team member on his/her contribution and the contributions of all other members of the team. The team member average from these member peer evaluations will account for 15% of the individual’s final grade.

Team success is the responsibility of all members of the team. Participation, conflicts, effort and team dynamics all affect final outcomes. Teams are responsible for identifying and addressing issues that arise and teams are expected to be respectful of their fellow members. If issues remain unresolved Prof. Robertson and Greta O’Brien can be a sounding board. The sample evaluation form is attached.

Confidentiality. All projects are undertaken under Confidentiality and Non-Disclosure Agreements, and all information received by the class is electronically stored on Canvas, a secure and restricted SharePoint site.

Course & Team Commitment. We ask that you not drop the course once you have been assigned to a team. Teams will be formed at the start of the project. Changes in team membership may not be made by team members. Project swapping is also not permitted among teams. While Prof. Robertson supports and advises each team, the students take ownership and primary responsibility for the successful delivery of the project.

Instructor Availability. Prof. Robertson will be available to the teams in class and as needed by email (robertson@wharton.upenn.edu); phone (215-898-9410); or we can arrange a mutually agreeable time for consultation (769 JMHH). Michele Klekotka always has Tom’s schedule. The teams are expected to keep him informed of progress or problems on a weekly basis in class and may share issues at any time by phone, text, or email.
About the Professor

THOMAS S. ROBERTSON. Joshua J. Harris Professor; Professor of Marketing; Academic Director, Baker Retailing Center; Executive Director, Wharton-INSEAD Alliance

Dr. Robertson is an expert in marketing strategy and competitive behavior, his recent research has focused on ephemerality in retailing and the forecasting of retail sales. Dr. Robertson is author, co-author or editor of a dozen books and almost 100 scholarly articles and book chapters. He has won numerous awards for his scholarship and has lectured widely in North and Central America, Europe, Asia, Australia, and Africa.

In 2014, Dr. Robertson completed a seven-year term as Dean of the Wharton School. In this role he raised substantial financial resources for the School, while championing global engagement, a strong culture of innovation, and business as a force for good. Under his leadership Wharton implemented a new MBA curriculum, a new initiative in public policy, creation of global modular courses, a research and teaching campus in Beijing, a commitment to lifelong learning for Wharton alumni, and the design of a portfolio of online courses reaching over two million participants worldwide.

From 1998 to 2004 Tom was Dean of Emory’s Goizueta Business School and is widely credited with positioning the school to compete as an international leader in business education. He served as founding Executive Faculty Director of the Institute for Developing Nations, a joint-venture research initiative with The Carter Center.

He is an active board member in the university and corporate domains. He serves on the Advisory Boards of the Sorbonne and Indian School of Business, and is a member of the Board of Directors of the Carlyle Group. Formerly, he was a director of CRA International, a trustee of Singapore Management University, and served on the Advisory Boards of Tsinghua University and Guanghua School of Management (Peking University).

About the Teaching Assistant

GRETA O’BRIEN. 2nd year MBA student at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania.

Greta is a second year MBA candidate focusing in Marketing and Operations. Prior to Wharton, Greta was a consultant with Deloitte Digital. Her work focused on eCommerce, mobile, and digital strategy for retail clients. She has always been passionate about retail, from wanting to be a fashion designer as a child to landing her dream internship at Nike, Inc. while in college at Duke University. At Wharton, Greta is on the board of Retail Club and Wharton Charity Fashion Show and was a choreographer for Dance Studio 2019. Over the summer, she interned at Walmart as a member of their Digital Acceleration team.

About the Guest Experts

We have asked a couple of guest “experts” to be available in class on certain days if the projects move in certain directions.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>8/25/19</td>
<td><strong>Before start of the course</strong> Link to the survey:</td>
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<td></td>
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<td><a href="https://whartonbakeretail.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8iSYnjUs3LCrFIg">https://whartonbakeretail.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8iSYnjUs3LCrFIg</a></td>
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<td><strong>DUE BY 9 AM WEDNESDAY, 8/28</strong> Complete the Qualtrics survey that was</td>
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<td>sent to you via Canvas to describe your background, preferences for</td>
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<td>projects, etc. (data are used for the forming of project teams)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>8/28/19</td>
<td>Course overview:</td>
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<td>• Cursory overview of projects</td>
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<td>• Logistics and expectations</td>
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<td>• Presentation by one project sponsor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>9/2/19</td>
<td><em>No Class. Have a safe and happy Labor Day!</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>9/4/19</td>
<td>Update on initial project contacts</td>
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<td>Monday</td>
<td>9/9/19</td>
<td><em>Students should not drop the course after this date</em></td>
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<td>Initial project thoughts—Prof. Robertson and Greta O’Brien</td>
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<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>9/11/19</td>
<td>Teams working alone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>9/16/19</td>
<td>Individual team meetings with Prof. Robertson and Greta O’Brien</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>9/18/19</td>
<td>Teams working alone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>9/23/19</td>
<td><strong>Proposals to Clients</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>9/25/19</td>
<td><strong>Visit from Industry Expert</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>9/30/19</td>
<td>Teams working alone</td>
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<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>10/2/19</td>
<td>Team meetings with Prof. Robertson and Greta O’Brien</td>
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<td>Monday</td>
<td>10/7/19</td>
<td>Teams working alone</td>
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<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>10/9/19</td>
<td><strong>Project update presentation 1:</strong> Each project team meets with Tom</td>
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<td>and Greta for an update presentation (time TBD)</td>
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<td><em>Please submit slides by midnight on Oct. 8th</em></td>
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<td>Monday</td>
<td>10/14/19</td>
<td>Midpoint Presentation to Sponsors</td>
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<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>10/16/19</td>
<td><strong>Visit from Industry Expert</strong></td>
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<td>Monday</td>
<td>10/21/19</td>
<td>Team meetings with Prof. Robertson and Greta O’Brien</td>
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<td>Team meetings with Prof. Robertson and Greta O’Brien</td>
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<td>Monday</td>
<td>11/4/19</td>
<td>Teams working alone</td>
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<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>11/6/19</td>
<td>Teams working alone</td>
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<td>Monday</td>
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<td>Visit from industry expert</td>
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<td>Visit from industry expert</td>
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<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>11/20</td>
<td>Team meetings with Prof. Robertson and Greta O’Brien</td>
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<td>Monday</td>
<td>11/25</td>
<td>Team meetings with Prof. Robertson and Greta O’Brien</td>
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<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>11/27</td>
<td>No Class. Happy Thanksgiving!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>12/2</td>
<td>Due: Final project documentations (slides; executive brief)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>12/4</td>
<td>Final project presentation: Each project team meets with the professor</td>
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<td>and client for the final presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>12/9</td>
<td>Final project presentation: Each project team meets with the professor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>12/9</td>
<td>and client for the final presentation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Potentially Relevant Readings Depending on Project Focus. The Lippincott Librarians also are very helpful.

**Retail in General**

- Dart, Michael and Robin Lewis (2017), *Retail’s Seismic Shift*, St. Martin’s Press.
- Chen, Oliver, John Kernan and John Blackledge (2017), *Retail’s Disruption Yield Opportunities—Star Wars! Cowen and Company Equity Research* (April) 3-34.
- Galloway, Scott (2017), *The Four*, Portfolio/Penguin

**Consumers and Customer Journey**

Technology in Retail

- “An interactive inventory of retail technologies,” [www.retail-tech.org](http://www.retail-tech.org). This is an online tool
- Tapscott, Don and Alex Tapscott (2016). *Blockchain Revolution*: New York: Portfolio Penguin
- Schwab, Jason (2018). “How incoming store technology will change retail forever.”

Innovation


Omnichannel


Luxury

Subscription Models and Loyalty Programs


Branding and Brand Extension


Word of Mouth and Buzz


Millennials / Gen-Z

- “What Gen Z Wants,” (2019, April 29), Bloomberg Businessweek
Project Management

- Lock, Dennis (2013), *Naked Project Management: The Bare Facts*, Taylor and Francis
- Marks, Tony (2012), *20:20 Project Management: How to Deliver on Time, on Budget and on Spec*, Kogan Page Limited