

2023 - 2024

DAVID SOBEY RETAILING CENTRE

Annual Report

Shaping the **Future** of Retail





In Memory of
Dr. David F. Sobey

C.M., DComm'91, Chair Emeritus of Sobeys Inc.,
Chancellor Emeritus of Saint Mary's University

1931-2023



The David Sobey Retailing Centre was made possible due to a generous and visionary gift from Dr. David F. Sobey. We are honoured to have had his support and are committed to upholding his vision for a vibrant and innovative retail sector in Canada. Through our work, we aim to carry forward Dr. Sobey's enduring legacy, ensuring that his contributions continue to make a difference for years to come.

Introduction

The David Sobey Retailing Centre plays a vital role in the exciting and important retail landscape. As a thought leader and trusted partner in the industry, it is committed to "Shaping the Future of Retail" through research, innovation, and education. The Centre collaborates closely with retailers to identify issues and opportunities, produce relevant, actionable insights, and educate current and future industry leaders.

Established in 2014 through a visionary and generous gift by Dr. David F. Sobey, Chair Emeritus of Sobeys Inc., the Centre honors his legacy as an iconic and well-respected leader in Canadian retail. Dr. Sobey's generosity and vision continue to inspire and guide the Centre's initiatives. The David Sobey Retailing Centre is part of the Sobey School of Business, one of Canada's most respected business schools, located at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

“
Our vision is to be the **leading source** of expertise and insights for the retail sector.”

DR. RAMESH VENKAT, DIRECTOR DAVID SOBEY RETAILING CENTRE



A letter from the Director

DR. RAMESH VENKAT

The David Sobey Retailing Centre aspires to play a constructive role in shaping the future of retail in Canada and beyond. We are uniquely positioned to do this through our three core areas that focus on the retail sector – cutting-edge research that addresses major challenges and questions faced by retailers, innovation that solves problems for retailers, and executive education that develops transformational retail leaders.

In this past year, we made great strides in all three areas. We have faculty engaged in a wide range of research projects that will be of value to decision-makers in retail companies. Some of the topics include the study of micro-fulfillment centres, consumer response to AI, deeper understanding of shopper behaviour using biometric technologies such as EEG, and improving retail hiring and retention in the retail sector.

The David Sobey Retailing Centre has created a computer vision-based self-checkout system, which can detect items in a shopping basket and charge the right price, without having to scan the bar codes. This is part of our frictionless store-lab project, which is the first-of-its-kind store without a checkout that will also function as a research lab.

A new training program for store managers will be launched in 2025, addressing an important gap in retail leadership development. The David Sobey Retailing Centre will also be supporting the Retail Management certificate that will be offered to undergraduate business students starting in 2025.

We would like to thank our Advisory Council, faculty, students, and retail partners who work with us, and share our vision of shaping the future of retail.

Shaping the Future of Retail

This past year, the David Sobey Retailing Centre completed a comprehensive rebranding initiative to refine its identity and strengthen its impact within the retail sector. The previous name, David Sobey Centre for Innovation in Retailing & Services, was lengthy and difficult for audiences to remember, leading to misunderstandings about the Centre's purpose. To address this, we adopted the streamlined name David Sobey Retailing Centre. This new name is clearer, more memorable, and effectively communicates our focus on advancing retail.

The rebranding effort also introduced our new positioning statement: "Shaping the Future of Retail". This phrase not only captures the Centre's vision but serves as a guiding principle in everything we do. By committing to Shaping the Future of Retail, the Centre is positioned as a source of thought leadership and innovation, identifying emerging challenges, offering guidance on opportunities, and generating actionable insights to propel the industry forward. This statement reflects our dedication to creating a retail landscape that is vibrant, innovative, and poised for success.

This rebranding marks a pivotal step in the Centre's journey, sharpening our focus and reinforcing our commitment to equipping retailers with the insights and strategies they need to excel in a rapidly evolving industry. Through this renewed identity, the David Sobey Retailing Centre reaffirms its role as a trusted partner and leader, driving progress and innovation in retail.



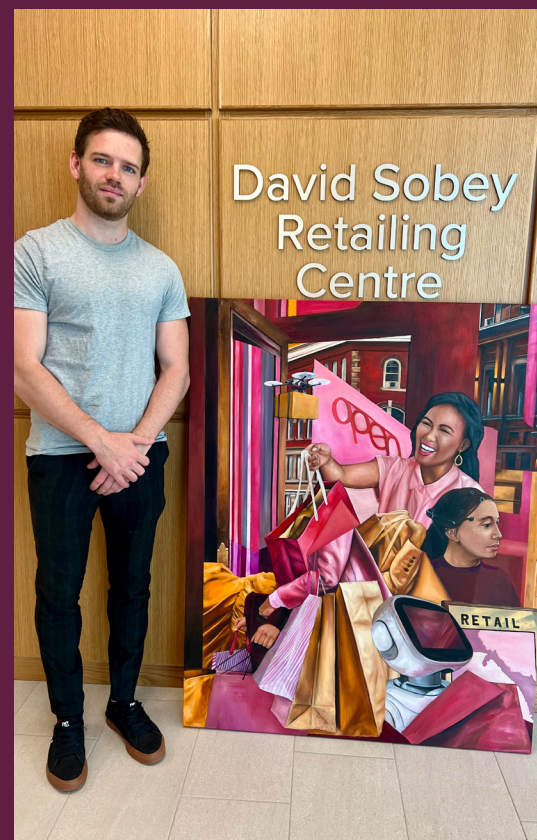
AS PART OF THE REBRANDING, WE REFINED OUR MISSION STATEMENT THAT ALIGNS OUR VALUES WITH THOSE OF THE PROGRESSIVE RETAIL LEADERS WE SUPPORT:

For forward-looking retail leaders who, like us, believe the future arrives daily and staying ahead is essential, the David Sobey Retailing Centre is the **leader in future-focused applied research**. Purposefully "Shaping the Future of Retail," we are a collaborative partner, helping retailers make informed decisions, attract top talent, and elevate organizational excellence.



ART MEETS INNOVATION

The Centerpiece of Our New Space



▲ ARTIST JOHN MCPARTLAND
STANDING WITH CANVAS PAINTING

This custom artwork, created by renowned local artist John McPartland, captures the essence and vision of the David Sobey Retailing Centre. This inspiring piece will serve as the centerpiece in our new office and lab space within the Sobey Inspiration Hub (room SH433), offering a visual representation of our commitment to innovation and excellence in retail. Visitors are welcome to experience the artwork's intricate details in person at the Centre.

We extend our gratitude to John, whose vibrant murals can be seen bringing life to popular Halifax locations such as Barrington, Argyle, and Gottingen Street. His remarkable talent brings a unique artistic touch to our space, further enhancing the dynamic atmosphere of our Centre.



Research

The David Sobey Retailing Centre conducts and funds applied and collaborative research. Most often conducted with industry partners, the Centre addresses real issues and opportunities relevant to the retail sector. The Centre's research provides actionable insights and new knowledge that improve business practices and outcomes for retailers. Its researchers focus on contemporary, cutting-edge issues and opportunities, and are experts in areas such as; consumer & shopper behaviour, biometric research, AI machine learning, robotics & automation, category management, human capital & labour, and more.

\$30,000

in retail research grants awarded

3

projects funded

Award recipients



DR. ETHAN PANCER | Associate Professor
Sobey School of Business, Marketing Department

Project:
Consumer Responses to Product Innovation from Generative AI



DR. HADI ESLAMI | Assistant Professor
Sobey School of Business, Marketing Department

Project:
Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL) Adoption and Shareholder Value of Retailers



DR. BAHAREH MANSOURI | Assistant Professor
Sobey School of Business Finance, Information Systems and
Management Science

Project: Towards sustainable urban freight planning: the integration of micro-distribution centers into the urban transportation network

Innovation

Innovation is fundamental to the success of the global retail industry. The David Sobey Retailing Centre funds, develops, and tests new technologies, processes, and methodologies critical to the future of retail. Projects focus on solving industry-relevant challenges through unique and affordable solutions while engaging students with hands-on experience.

RETAIL DIGITAL TWIN

Bringing Unique Virtual Shopping Experience to Local Chocolatier

Halifax-based French confectionery Rousseau Chocolatier partnered with the David Sobey Retailing Centre to elevate the online shopping experience for its customers. Together, they developed a digital twin of the brand's boutique and café. This digital twin, created using advanced 3D scanning technology, is a highly detailed virtual replica of the physical store. It offers an immersive online shopping experience, allowing customers to explore the beautifully designed boutique from the comfort of their homes. In addition to enhancing customer engagement, the digital twin provides store operators with powerful tools for space visualization, analysis, and management. Now featured on the Rousseau Chocolatier website, it invites customers to virtually experience the charm and ambiance of the boutique, seamlessly blending the in-store and online shopping worlds. The Centre is currently working with other local retailers to bring their physical stores to the digital world.



▲ L TO R: **DR. JASON RHINELANDER**, HEAD OF TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION, DSC; **UZAIR TAHIR**, STUDENT, MASTER OF SCIENCE IN APPLIED SCIENCE



▲ **NATHALIE MORIN**, CO-FOUNDER, ROUSSEAU CHOCOLATIER WELCOMING VISITORS IN THE DIGITAL TWIN

Frictionless Store-Lab Development

Over the past year, the David Sobey Retailing Centre has been developing an autonomous "Store-Lab," an innovative, frictionless store called no-Q on the Saint Mary's University campus, due to launch in 2025. This space will be the first, built in-house, frictionless store at a North American university, powered by advanced computer vision and shelf sensor technology developed within the Centre. The no-Q store will offer seamless shopping—simply tap a credit card to enter, select items, and leave without traditional checkouts, thanks to a cashierless system that operates with high standards for consumer privacy. Importantly, no facial recognition or video footage will be collected, ensuring a secure, and privacy-focused shopping experience.

Beyond providing convenience, the no-Q Store-Lab will be a dynamic testing ground for retail innovation, offering students invaluable hands-on learning experiences in a real-world retail environment. It will enable the campus community to purchase essential products, while also supporting research on new products and innovative retail technologies. Faculty-led experiments will explore topics such as the effectiveness of promotions, packaging, and other consumer-driven factors, providing valuable insights for the retail industry. The Centre is actively pursuing technology and business partnerships to support this unique venture, reinforcing our commitment to shaping the future of retail through innovation and real-world application.



MOCK-UP OF NO-Q
FRICTIONLESS STORE



CURRENT UNFINISHED SPACE FOR
THE FRICTIONLESS STORE-LAB.
RENOVATIONS ARE ONGOING.

Education

An established leader in retail education, the Centre offers a full suite of professional development programs for experienced executives and mid-level managers. Participants leave with concepts and skills they can apply immediately. These programs help retailers respond and succeed in the rapidly changing retail landscape.

The Centre also offers a range of activities and events that expose students to opportunities in the retail sector and unique learning experiences. From case competitions and speaker events featuring industry leaders, to retail tours and networking opportunities, students gain real-world insights and experience that prepare them for successful careers in retail.

Category Management Program



The Category Management Program is crafted for Category Managers seeking to refine their skills and achieve exceptional outcomes. This program covers a wide range of topics, including data-driven decision-making, optimized assortment planning, and effective collaboration with suppliers. This program gives participants the tools to create a fully integrated Category Management practice that delivers superior results for the company.

District Manager Program



The Leadership Development for District Managers Program is designed to empower District Managers, Regional VPs, and high-potential store managers. Through this comprehensive curriculum, participants gain insights into advanced retail management strategies, leadership skills, strategic decision-making, and team building. This program strengthens retailer's leadership pipelines and drives sustainable growth within territories.



I had a great time getting to know everyone and learned a ton! The material we covered wasn't anything new or topics we hadn't heard before, but I was able to gain another perspective through the group discussions and classroom setting. It made me think outside of the box and how to apply my learnings to real-life day-to-day operations, in ways that I may not have done before. My favorite 2 topics were change management and store visits. 10 out of 10, I have spoken very highly of the program to my upper leaders and training team. I'm happy I had the opportunity to go through the program.

BOBBY RIDLEY | DISTRICT MANAGER IN TRAINING, RURAL KING

RISE (Retail Innovation, Strategy & Excellence)

The RISE Executive Education program grows leadership and decision-making skills helping retailers drive operational excellence and strategic growth. Whether it's shaping the overall direction of your organization or leading key initiatives, this program provides participants with insights and skills to navigate the complex and fast-paced retail landscape.



MIKE NORD | CEO
DISCOVERY CO-OPERATIVE

I recently had the privilege of participating in the David Sobey Retailing Centre Rise Program, an initiative designed for executives committed to continuous professional development. I was thoroughly impressed by the exceptional quality and comprehensive content of the program. The caliber of speakers was remarkable, each bringing valuable insights that are not only relevant to today's dynamic business landscape but also equipped us with tools to stay ahead in the future. Additionally, the interaction and engagement among the leaders attending played a crucial role in the program, fostering a highly conducive learning environment that encouraged all participants to strive for excellence. This experience has undoubtedly enriched my leadership capabilities."



27 retail professionals trained from **15** different retail companies across Canada and the United States, including:



574 total registered attendees across all Retail Month events

Each year in October, the David Sobey Retailing Centre dedicates the month to highlight the vibrant world of retail, showcasing its dynamic and rewarding career opportunities for students, and provide valuable insights to retail professionals through a series of special events.

Discovering Retail

An expert panel of retail HR executives explored diverse career paths with students, highlighting the exciting opportunities within the industry. They demonstrated how retail is not only shaping careers but also driving the future of innovation and growth.

Discovering Retail: Your Path to Limitless Opportunities

Wanda Walkden
Chief HR & Comms Officer
Staples Canada

Michael Charest
VP People & Culture
Frank & Oak

Anne Fortin
Director Talent & Culture
La Maison Simons

Khrista Jones
Provincial Leader
Decathlon

David Sobey Centre | Sobeys School of Business | Saint Mary's University

Oct 2 | 10:00AM | Virtual Event

Retail Tech Unveiled

This discussion explored the world of retail technology with our panel of esteemed technology executives and revealed the most thrilling trends shaping the industry's future. From Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Robotics to Data Analytics and Customer Experience, the panel dove into the game-changers that are and will be redefining retail.

Retail Tech Unveiled: Exploring the Trends of Tomorrow

with guest speakers:

Stewart Samuel
Director of Retail Futures, IGD

Trey Fancher
Partner, IBM

David Sobey Centre | Sobeys School of Business | Saint Mary's University

October 16 | Virtual | 1:00 p.m.

Distinguished Retailer Speaker Series

The David Sobey Retailing Centre was honored to host Rachel Huckle, President & COO of Staples Canada, as this year's Distinguished Retailer Speaker. Rachel's engaging storytelling captivated the audience as she shared insights from her unconventional career journey and her commitment to a people-first approach to leadership. Her inspiring message resonated deeply with attendees, emphasizing the importance of fostering a positive organizational culture and empowering individuals within the retail sector.

The event attracted a diverse audience, including students, faculty, staff, alumni, and members of the local business community, creating an enriching environment for discussion and networking. Following Rachel's presentation, a reception was held, providing attendees with the opportunity to connect with her personally and expand their professional networks. This event not only showcased the Centre's commitment to thought leadership in retail but also fostered valuable connections within the community.



▲ **RACHEL HUCKLE**, PRESIDENT & COO, STAPLES CANADA



▲ L TO R: **AUSTIN CASTELLANOS**, OPERATIONS MANAGER, DSC; **RACHEL HUCKLE**, PRESIDENT & COO, STAPLES CANADA; **MARK INNES**, CHIEF RETAIL ENGAGEMENT OFFICER, DSC; **DR. RAMESH VENKAT**, DIRECTOR, DSC





Retail Tour

The Retail Tour provides students with a unique, behind-the-scenes look at some of Canada's leading retailers. This immersive experience unpacks key elements of retail success—from marketing and business strategy to the complexities of supply chain management and customer experience. Students gain an invaluable insider's perspective on what it takes to operate a thriving retail business.

Last year's tour featured exclusive insights from industry leaders, including Best Buy, Walmart, and Decathlon, offering students a first-hand view of their innovative approaches and operational excellence.



National Retail Case Competition

The David Sobey Retailing Centre National Retail Case Competition offers students a one-of-a-kind opportunity to tackle real-world challenges and obstacles faced by national and multinational retailers, all while engaging in spirited competition with teams from across Canada.

This year's competition was in partnership with Decathlon Canada, whose executive team collaborated closely with the Centre. Together, they developed a dynamic case study, giving students the opportunity to engage directly with Decathlon's business challenges. The Decathlon team also met with participants to offer insights and provide a deeper understanding of the problem, ensuring a meaningful and impactful learning experience for all.



8 Universities
Nova Scotia to
British Columbia



13 teams



52 students



\$7,000
prize money



It has been an absolute pleasure to participate in the David Sobey Retailing Centre National Retail Case Competition for the past two years. Currently in my fourth year pursuing a Bachelor of Business Administration at Wilfrid Laurier University, I am thrilled to leverage the skills acquired from this competition in my professional journey as I join PepsiCo full-time this fall. This case competition has helped me learn how to think outside of the box, confidently present in front of senior industry leaders, and most importantly, work as a team player. If you are an undergraduate university student, I highly recommend participating in this competition! By doing so, you can acquire technical business skills, discover personal strengths, and have the added bonus of the chance to win some prize money!"

SOPHIA DIVITA | 1ST PLACE TEAM
4TH YEAR, BACHELOR OF BUSINESS
ADMINISTRATION WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY

ATLANTIC MARKETING SYMPOSIUM:

Consumer Behaviour in a Changing Retail Landscape

This past June, the David Sobey Retailing Centre proudly hosted and sponsored the Atlantic Marketing Symposium. This one-day conference brought together 30 distinguished academics from universities across Atlantic Canada and Ontario, who presented their latest research on consumer behavior and other critical topics shaping the retail industry.

The symposium provided a valuable forum for academic exchange, where like-minded researchers shared insights, gained feedback, and explored collaborative opportunities. In addition, an industry panel featuring executives from Aldo Group, IBM Consulting, and Steel Auto Group offered an insider's perspective on the growing role of AI in today's retail landscape, highlighting potential research avenues for academics aiming to drive the future of retail.



RCC STORE CONFERENCE BOOTH:
AUSTIN CASTELLANOS, OPERATIONS MANAGER, DSC (L) AND
DR. JASON RHINELANDER, HEAD OF TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION, DSC (R)



ATLANTIC MARKETING SYMPOSIUM:
DR. RAMESH VENKAT MODERATING DISCUSSION WITH JEREMY
ADAMSON, VP BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE, STEELE AUTO GROUP

STRENGTHENING CONNECTIONS:

The David Sobey Retailing Centre at Retail Council of Canada Conferences

The David Sobey Retailing Centre showcased its initiatives at two prominent Retail Council of Canada conferences: the Human Resources Conference and the STORE Conference, Canada's largest retail conference. These events provided an excellent platform for the Centre to promote its activities and engage with retail leaders from across the country. Attendees had the opportunity to learn about the Centre's unique executive education programs and experience demonstrations of cutting-edge retail

innovations, including the virtual reality store, retail robot, advanced computer vision, and biometrics equipment for consumer behavior research. Retailers expressed their admiration for the work being done at the Centre and demonstrated a keen interest in exploring potential collaborations. These interactions not only allowed the Centre to establish meaningful connections with industry leaders but also significantly enhanced awareness of the David Sobey Retailing Centre on a national stage.

Advisory Council



VIVEK SOOD | CHAIR
Executive Vice President,
Related Businesses,
Sobeys Inc.



DIANE J. BRISEBOIS
President & Chief
Executive Officer, Retail
Council of Canada



LOUISE-ANNE COMEAU
Vice President, New Energy
Markets & Innovation, Emera



JOE JACKMAN
Founder & Executive Chair,
Jackman Reinvents



JULIA KNOX
Chief Technology & Analytics
Officer, Sobeys Inc.



DAVE S. SOBEY
Vice President, Operations -
Atlantic, Sobeys Inc.



DOUG STEPHENS
Founder & President,
Retail Prophet



JULIE TOSKAN
Founder & President,
Youth & Philanthropy Initiative Canada



WANDA WALKDEN
Chief Human Resources &
Communications Officer,
Staples Canada

David Sobey Retailing Centre Saint Mary's University

902-496-8272
davidsobeycentre@smu.ca

DAVIDSOBEYCENTRE.CA

