**Introduction**

Many people have met emerging professionals who have aspired to becoming a fashion buyer. A lot less have met aspiring merchandisers, and even fewer have heard of the role. Of those who have, many confuse it with the visual merchandising or supply chain disciplines. This is not surprising, as much the activities of the role are hidden from view and not easily identifiable within the ranges within stores. A second complicating factor is that the role is not a uniform global one, and in different places around the world its title and activities differ. In North America for example, the term merchandising is more akin to the UK buying role, while in Asia, it sits more comfortably within the supply chain role.

There have been many excellent resources created for the creative and buyer led activities within buying and merchandising, but few for merchandising. Of those that do exist, many refer to merchandising activities within the context of a bigger subject such as retail management, or provide a review within a related specialism, most notably fashion buying. The fundamental aim of this book therefore is to provide a perception of the role, its relevance and place within fashion management. This is achieved from the perspective of the UK and provides a mix of discussion and application. As such, it will debate various topics and present an argument for a delineation of the merchandiser activities from that of the buyer, and then move on to a practical demonstration of the role.

One characteristic of fashion retailing industry today is the myriad of business models that exist, all of whom will differ in some way in their use of the buying and merchandising function. It therefore would be impossible to cover every possible nuance of the role and then comment on its use in differing businesses. In addition, it would be impractical not to have to make assumptions within the text to help make the practical demonstration concise. Where possible, as fuller a review of the processes of the merchandiser has been made, but this text cannot be authoritative and is offered to add to the debate and be a springboard for further research and publications. Those in the industry, studying at further and higher education, and in particular post graduates should find that the text provides a framework around which they can further develop their careers or studies. The exercises that have been created and are available on the Palgrave MacMillan website will also enable readers to try out their own planning process to see it at work.

To facilitate all of the above, the book is divided into three parts.

1. An introductory discussion, justification and explanation of the fashion merchandiser role
2. A fictional case study to demonstrate the role in action that follows a “concept to carrier bag” process model
3. A summary discussion of influences and factors that current fashion merchandising roles must consider in the discharge of their duties

To support the context of the role, Part I also includes a review of the fashion buyer role, and the support roles within a buying and merchandising department. Beyond that, the book concentrates almost exclusively on the fashion merchandiser and so some chapters; particularly in Part III, are discussed only within the remit of this book, deliberately bypassing wider discussion points.

At its heart, this book presents a view on product management from the perspective of a highly numerate and logical standpoint. As the book unfolds, the reader is encouraged to relate this theoretical standpoint with the world around them, to make their own informed judgement of its relevance within their own individual set of professional or educational circumstances.