Abstract

Purpose
Through an account of the layout, operations, and four main product lines of a small Chicago bookstore between 1938 and 1947, the purpose of this paper is to show how a neighborhood retail establishment reacted to the sweeping events of the Great Depression and World War II.

Design/methodology/approach
The research is based upon multiple primary data sources including store financial records, family photographs, representative artifacts and ephemera, oral history interviews, and period retailing literature.

Findings
Located in an area of Chicago heavily populated by Polish and Jewish immigrants and their children, General Book Store was a traditional mom and pop operation. The mix of its product lines—books and magazines, model kits, greeting cards, and camera supplies and photo-finishing—evolved over time while always connecting customers to the national experience. The store afforded its owners a modest, but upwardly mobile middle-class life style.

Originality/value
Although much has been written on large-scale retailing, marketing historians have conducted very little research on small-scale retailing in the USA. This study documents the intermingling of a business and a household economy and how the management of merchandise assortments and maintenance of customer relationships depended upon both owner interests and the opportunities and constraints presented by environmental forces.

Keywords
Retailing  |  History  |  Economic depression  |  Small enterprises  |  United States of America

Citation
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National center - Northeastern Illinois along Lake Michigan. September, June and August are the most pleasant months in Chicago, while January and December are the least comfortable months. A world-class commercial, industrial and cultural city, Chicago functions as a major national center and as the major regional center for America's heartland. It originally emerged as a transport center for cargo headed west and agricultural products headed east by land and water. Although transportation technology has changed, the role has not. The city is the most important passenger and freight transport hub in the country with the largest number of air departures and the most rail traffic in the nation. The commercial and manufacturing economy stands out both for its size and diversity. Part bookstore, part electronics store, part coffee shop, the Chicago location is Amazon's first physical store in the Midwest and the first not in a shopping mall. Amazon is trying to take advantage of millions of Amazon.com customer ratings and reviews and use its big data to offer in-store customers new ways to discover and purchase popular books, both physical and digital. The average book rating is 4.5 out of 5. Although Amazon.com is a digital behemoth, online sales still account for just 8% of all retail sales in the US. Amazon says it wants every book in the store to be a great read. Amazon's bookstore in Chicago's Southport Corridor measures 6,000 square feet. Daniel McMahon/Business Insider.