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by Mark Mulligan

# Spanish professor who uncovers the detail in retail

## Business Education

Enterprising Academics

Constant contact with corporate life is a valuable teaching tool, says Mark Mulligan

About 15 years ago José Luis Nueno, a young Spanish marketing professor and business consultant, was asked to research the men's affordable fashion market in Spain, with particular reference to a competitor called Inditex.

The secretive Galician company, whose Zara brand was taking the high street by storm, was about to roll out a new line of stores and designs and the client wondered how this might affect its business.

The job was made to measure for the young professor. Born into a textile family, he had hands-on experience in the industry, a law degree from the Universidad de Barcelona, an MBA from Iese Business School in Spain and a DBA from Harvard Business School.

Fascinated by the sector and the emerging Inditex phenomenon, he set about the task with gusto,

strategy professor, and published in 2003, the case study is a definitive reference on the supply chain model behind perhaps the world's most efficient fashion retailer.

But the Zara story forms just a tiny part of the tireless professor's compendium of published work. He also co-wrote a case study on football club Real Madrid, which he says tells the story of "the fastest ever globalisation of a Spanish brand".

He is a prolific author of business books in Spanish and a regular contributor to business magazines, university journals and the press. Between writing and full-time teaching at Iese, he runs ABN Metrics, the market research agency he set up in 1995.

Prof Nueno estimates he and his staff have handled about 200 projects since then, for about 160 clients. His specialist knowledge of high-end retailing has won him contracts from luxury goods brands, while his experience in food and logistics allowed him to take on work from consumer giants such as Coca-Cola and Sara Lee.

This constant contact with corporate life provides a valuable classroom tool.

"All the participants in our MBA and executive

deploying an army of employees and students throughout the retailing networks of it and other textile groups.

The project formed the basis of what was, a decade later, to become one of Prof Nueno's most celebrated case studies. From his work with the client – whom he prefers not to name – he produced an initial thesis on Inditex's distribution model. He sent a copy of this to José María Castellano, then the chief executive of Inditex, inviting him to respond.

"He returned it with a couple of comments and a very kind letter saying that he was very impressed with how much we had been able to put together without talking to the company," recalls Prof Nueno. Years later, as Inditex was preparing for a stock market float, Prof Nueno invited the CEO to speak at one of his regular industry meetings at Iese's Barcelona campus.

"It was the first time Inditex ever spoke in public about its plans for the future," says Prof Nueno. He and Mr Castellano hit it off and the professor was given access to gather material for what became "Zara: Fast Fashion", one of Harvard Publishing's first interactive case studies.

Co-written with Pankaj Ghemawat, a Harvard



Case studies: Prof Nueno

## Industry meetings offer the ultimate networking experience

education programmes have been or are practitioners with at least four years of business experience," he says.

"What they expect from a business school is faculty that can give structure to their own experiences. This works best when you have staff with formal, or academic, knowledge of management thinking, along with enough experience to be able to explain the complexity of putting all of this into practice."

Prof Nueno also sits on the board of "about eight or nine companies" and has given classes at top business schools.

To the inevitable question about fitting so much in, Prof Nueno, 48, says his family – he is married with three children – is tolerant and his other family the Iese faculty allows him to juggle his interests.

The regular industry gatheringshe organises at Iese's Barcelona campus give him material for class work while providing the ultimate networking experience.

"The contact you have with one chief executive to see how a business is developing can't be compared with having contact with 250 in an organised forum," he says. The freedom to set up such meetings on campus, he says, is priceless.

**This is the third in a four-part series on entrepreneurial professors. For other professors to watch, go to [www.ft.com/bschool](http://www.ft.com/bschool)**