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Apple Hires Dixons Chief to Run Retail Stores

By JESSICA E. VASCELLARO



John Browett, the CEO of the troubled European electronics retailer, Dixons has been appointed head of retail by Apple in a move that certainly surprised the industry. WSJ's Ben Rooney analyzes the move.

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Apple Inc. tapped the chief of one of Europe's largest electronics retailers as its new head of retail, filling its most high-profile vacancy with a rare company outsider.

Apple announced Tuesday that John Browett, who has been chief executive of Dixons Retail PLC since 2007, would join the company as a senior vice president in charge of the technology giant's retail operations and expansion in April.

Mr. Browett, who was also an executive at Tesco PLC, replaces Ron Johnson, who left Apple to run J.C. Penney Co. in November. Mr. Johnson was credited with creating Apple's highly successful retail strategy, and his departure left a rare hole in Apple's executive ranks.

With the move, Apple is taking the unusual step of appointing a senior executive from outside the Cupertino, Calif. company. Apple hired executive search firm Egon Zehnder International to help with the search, according to people familiar with the

matter.

The company considered a range of executives from the U.S. and Europe, according to a person familiar with the matter. Apple also considered Steve Cano, an Apple retail executive who was one of Mr. Johnson's lieutenants, according to this person.

Mr. Browett, aged 46, headed Tesco's online operations before joining Dixons and was previously an adviser on retail and consumer goods at Boston Consulting Group Inc.

He is credited with leading a transformation of Dixons' fortunes through store revamps and service improvements amid severe headwinds caused by the economic downturn that saw U.S.-based competitor Best Buy Co. Inc. recently pull out of the U.K. market it entered with much fanfare in 2010.

In a statement, Apple's chief executive Tim Cook said Mr. Browett shared Apple's commitment to customer service. "We are thrilled to have him join our team and bring his incredible retail experience to Apple," he said.

As CEO of Dixons, Mr. Browett presided over a vast array of technology brands and superstores that sell items ranging from computers to washing machines.

Dixons' shares, which have risen more than 40% since the start of the year, fell 13% Tuesday after the announcement. The electronics chain said Sebastian James, Dixons' Group Operations Director, would become the company's new chief executive.

Dixons operates the Currys and PC World chains in the U.K. and also has stores in Nordic countries, Italy and Greece.

—Joann S Lublin contributed to this article.

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