

## MEET THE C-SUITE

## BILL JOHNSON, CEO OF CITI RETAIL SERVICES

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Welcome to Atlanta Business Chronicle's "Meet the C-Suite," where each week we will feature one of the city's most high profile c-level executives.

This week meet Bill Johnson, CEO of Citi Retail Services, one of North America's largest and most experienced retail credit solutions providers.

- **Name:** Bill Johnson
- **Company:** Citi Retail Services
- **Title:** CEO
- **Headquarters:** Atlanta
- **Background:** Before joining Citi in 1999, I held a number of executive positions at GE Capital.
- **First job:** Cleaning a barbershop on weekends at 13 years old.
- **Education:** MBA, Georgia State University
- **Residence:** Marietta, Ga.

**Business Strategy**

**How's business:** Since the beginning of 2014, Citi Retail Services has announced nine contract renewals – including Macy's – and four new credit card partnerships with retailers. We're deepening and expanding our relationships. With each partner – those we've worked with for years and those that are new to us – we're integrating our services, which go far beyond credit card issuing and servicing, into their business strategy to help both companies grow.

**Biggest challenge for your business:**

With the rapid adoption of e-commerce and the proliferation of smart-phone devices (64 percent of Americans own and use one, according to the Pew Research Center), the digital payments landscape is rapidly changing. And while this is the biggest challenge, it's also the biggest opportunity as we work in tandem with our retail partners to draw a new road map and create the next generation of payments solutions. Customers inherently like to touch and test merchandise, so I have no doubt that brick and mortar will remain a core part of the retail experience. But we're witnessing a big transformation in how customers transact.

**What's going to change at your company in the next year:**

Citi Retail Services is at the forefront of working with our retail partners to innovate and accelerate change in delivering a superior, highly personalized omnichannel experience for customers. Each of our partners has a unique digital strategy. It's our job to leverage our creativity and scale to develop industry-leading capabilities and put them



to work for them. For example, we've made significant investments in analytics that help us mine our customer behavior database, which is one of the industry's largest. We've seen up to 13 percent retail sales lifts from marketing efforts using these analytic techniques and resources that are exclusive to Citi. They give us a distinct competitive advantage in the Retail Cards space as we work with partners to grow their sales. In 2016, digital will become even more prevalent, and will continue to accelerate in coming years. Through this, we'll continue to grow our expertise and provide thought leadership to retailers and assist them through that shift, ensuring together we emerge ahead of the pack.

**Company goal yet to be achieved:**

We're working to ensure we can enable all the payment mechanisms our partners choose to offer now and in the future. Management philosophy

**Guiding principles for good management:**

Listen ... really listen. You can learn as much from what people tell you as what they don't. Also, truly listening

is a sign of respect and appreciation, which are emotions that all great leaders should convey to their teams.

**Best way to keep competitive edge:**

In my office is a sign with the Ralph Waldo Emerson quote: "This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it." Always stay abreast of developments in the industry and be nimble; change is not an "if" but rather a "when."

**Why people like working for you:**

There are a few basic values by which I operate. Be open, honest and transparent. Give people the tools and opportunities to do their job well. Don't ask anyone to do something you wouldn't do yourself. Integrity is built over time and lost in an instant. I believe my team would say that I walk the talk. I don't believe in asking anyone to do anything that I wouldn't do myself.

**Most inspiring entrepreneur:** Bernie Marcus and Arthur Blank, the founders of The Home Depot, revolutionized how people shop for home improvement goods and services. The company they built helps fuel

the small business economy and remains at the forefront of retail today. The Home Depot is a great example of a retailer whose brick and mortar is flourishing along with their e-commerce. They are strong leaders, exceptional business people and inspiring role models.

**Judgment calls**

**Best business decision:** Hiring good, talented people who compete as a team – not as individuals – and excel in working together to drive business success.

**Hardest lesson learned and how you learned it:** Make the tough decisions early. When delayed, they only get tougher over time.

**Toughest business decision:** Any time there are reductions in the workforce. These decisions are ones that affect individuals, their families and their future and therefore are taken very seriously.

**Biggest missed opportunity:** A friend encouraged me to buy \$2,500.00 worth of Walmart stock in 1975. I didn't. Today it would be worth over \$20 million.

True confessions

**Like best about job:** The talented and inspiring people I interact with on a daily basis both internally and at our retail partners.

**Like least about job:** Being away from my family when I travel.

**Pet peeve:** Clutter

**First choice for a new career:** Consulting or a professional arbitrator.

**Predilections**

**Most influential book:** "The Power of Positive Thinking" by Norman Vincent Peale.

**Favorite cause:** Our Atlanta employees are involved in a number of community activities, and I especially enjoy hands-on volunteering with the Atlanta Furniture Bank and the Northwest Metro affiliate of Habitat for Humanity.

**Favorite restaurant:** I travel quite a bit for work and attend many business dinners at terrific restaurants, but seldom do I enjoy a meal as much as I do on a Friday night with my kids and grandkids — wherever that may be.

**Favorite way to spend free time:** On the floor or in the pool playing with my grandkids.

**Favorite music:** Bruce Springsteen, The Rising.