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PALM SPRINGS STYLE

During Style Fashion Week Palm Springs, a number of California-based designers unveiled collections for Fall 2018, including this look from David Tupaz. For more collections from Style Fashion Week Palm Springs, see pages 6 and 7.

MARK GUNTER

QUARTERLY FINANCIAL REPORT

Bumps Along the Way Don't Deter U.S. Economy

By Deborah Belgum *Executive Editor*

Lately, the apparel and retail world has been centered around three Ts: taxes, tariffs and trade.

Tax cuts are part of the positive in this equation. They not only benefited U.S. businesses whose tax rate dropped from 35 percent to 20 percent but also deposited more money into consumers' pocketbooks now that their paychecks are filled with more dollars.

Tariffs are the bad part of the equation, making people wonder whether they will be paying more for food, clothing and cars down the road if President Trump holds true on a threat to add another \$150 billion to the already \$150 billion in new tariffs being floated.

Trade is another question mark as the Trump administration wobble wobbles on whether the United States might join the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the free-trade agreement that has already been signed by 11 of the 12 countries that originally negotiated the pact. As soon as Trump took office, he said we

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Digital Summit Los Angeles Promotes Efficient Customer Engagement

By Dorothy Crouch *Associate Editor*

For the third year, **Digital Summit Los Angeles** brought together marketing leaders at the **Skirball Cultural Center**. On April 10 and 11, nearly 1,000 attendees networked and listened to experts explain how to successfully use digital tools to engage customers.

During his "Developing Innovative Solutions for a Better Customer Experience," Scott Emmons, head of the **Neiman Marcus** Innovation Lab (iLab), shared his insight regarding personalizing the shopping experience for customers. Emphasizing the importance of starting simple, Emmons advised attendees to think about how to bring business fundamentals into the digital age.

"You can't always chase the shiny and new," he said. "Sometimes innovation is part of just changing the basic way you do your business."

Since 2012, Emmons has been working to enhance the ways

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INSIDE

Where fashion gets down to businessSM



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LA Apparel Contractor Ships 'Hot Goods' to Charlotte Russe, Prompting Restraining Order

RK Apparel Inc., an apparel contractor that illegally shipped clothing to **Charlotte Russe** from a subcontractor allegedly not paying minimum wage or overtime, was slapped with a "hot goods" temporary restraining order following an investigation by the U.S. Labor Department.

The temporary restraining order, announced on April 13, was issued by the U.S. District Court in Los Angeles.

Investigators from the U.S. Department of Labor found that RK Apparel's subcontractor, **HDK Ave. Inc.**, did not pay its employees the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour, which is significantly lower than

the California minimum wage of \$11 an hour and the Los Angeles County minimum wage of \$12 an hour. Despite being warned by the Labor Department about HDK's labor status, RK went ahead and shipped nearly 80 boxes of garments in February and March to Charlotte Russe, court documents said.

Some of HDK's employees received only \$4 per hour, said Janet Herold, the U.S. Department of Labor's regional solicitor in Los Angeles. The government determined that the workers were owed \$168,000 in back wages and overtime. As part of a consent judgment, RK Apparel and HDK agreed to deposit \$40,000 as the first payment for the

back wages owed.

Under the provisions of the order, HDK and RK Apparel, owned by Jessie Lee, cannot ship its goods until the unpaid back wages have been made to the sewing factory's employees.

The defendants will also be required to hire an independent third-party monitor, acceptable to the Labor Department, to monitor all of its domestic garment contractors to enforce the contractors' compliance.

"Whenever goods are produced in violation of the FLSA's [Fair Labor Standards Act] minimum wage, overtime or child-labor provisions, the U.S. Department of Labor can restrain

those goods from being shipped in interstate commerce. This action is commonly referred to as invoking the 'hot goods' provision," Herold said. "Today's action demonstrates that we will use all of the tools provided by law to ensure that employees receive the pay they have legally earned and that law-abiding employers are not undercut by unfair competition."

The employees were not paid overtime, as required by federal law, when they worked more than 40 hours a week. Labor Department investigators found that HDK required their employees to work up to 58 hours per week but only paid them at a piece rate, or a flat amount per garment produced.—*Andrew Asch*

The North Face and the National Park Foundation Partner to Promote Sustainability

Long known as an outdoor brand whose apparel shields its customers from the elements as its corporate mission protects the environment from threats, Alameda, Calif.-based **The North Face** encourages customers to lead active lifestyles and take action to protect nature. The company's most recent venture, called the "Bottle Source" initiative, is no different. In observance of Earth Day on April 22, The North Face partnered with the **National Park Foundation** and released a new clothing line composed of yarn made from recycled plastic sourced from water bottles found at the Grand Teton, Great Smoky Mountains and Yosemite national parks.

"Reducing the amount of waste in parks, increasing the amount of recycling in parks, and creating more awareness about the parks and how to be a responsible visitor to the parks," said James Rogers, director of sus-

tainability for The North Face, when asked about the company's goals for the project.

Released on April 17, the collection's T-shirts and tote bag feature messages such as "Never Stop Exploring" and "John Muir Is My Homeboy," which are intended to inspire outdoor adventures. Other designs simply feature the brand's logo, along with flowers, including one design that brings California's state flower—the poppy—center stage.

"We wanted to have fun with useful graphics that tie back to the parks," Rogers said.

The North Face is putting its money where



its activism is by donating \$1 from the sale of each piece to the National Park Foundation. Despite its existing pledge to contribute

a minimum of \$100,000 to the cause, The North Face hopes to generate a much larger amount.

Through these contributions, the National Park Foundation will be able to continue its efforts promoting sustainability, such as the installation of water-bottle refill stations and bear-proof recycling bins. While the monetary contributions will support sustainability efforts in the parks, transforming plastic bottles into a new, long-lasting product reduces the amount of refuse that would otherwise contribute to polluting the environment.

"From an environmental perspective, we are extending the life of these materials," explained Rogers. "Single-use plastic bottles, when they get to the end consumer, last a matter of minutes. The T-shirt comes with a lifetime warranty, so it will definitely be used longer."

By participating in this project, The North Face has already collected 160,000 pounds of plastic waste from park MRFs (materials recycling facilities) for reuse in the program. Once the bottles were collected, The North Face

used the services of North Carolina-based textile supplier **Unifi Manufacturing Inc.** As a vertically integrated producer of multifilament polyester, the company was able to clean the bottles before fully breaking down the pieces, extruding the material and creating the yarn. Once the materials were ready, the line was manufactured in Central America.

With the launch of the first season underway, The North Face will continue its support of the National Park Foundation through other projects and is going to release a Fall 2018 collection for the Bottle Source initiative.

"We've been partners with the National Park Foundation. Our relationship predates this specific program," explained Rogers. "I think everyone was pretty excited about this idea to highlight our relationship with the park and spark investment in these sustainability projects."

The current collection includes short-sleeved T-shirts that retail at \$35 and tote bags priced at \$40; next season the company will add long-sleeved T-shirts and hooded sweatshirts using new designs and graphics. The company intends to keep its short-sleeved T-shirts for Fall, but the tote bags were planned only for the current collection.

In addition to availability at www.thenorthface.com and at its retail locations in the United States, the line will also be sold through some of the concessions areas within the partner parks.—*Dorothy Crouch*

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Calendar

April 22

Arizona Apparel, Accessories, Shoes & Gift Show
Phoenix Convention Center
Phoenix
Through April 24

April 25

DG Expo Fabric & Trim Show
Dallas Market Center
Dallas
Through April 26

April 26

2018 Graduation Fashion Show
Academy of Art University
San Francisco

2018 Fashion Show, presented by FCI Fashion School
423 E. Washington Blvd.
Los Angeles

April 29

Midwest Apparel Trade Show
1445 Lake Cook Road
Deerfield, Ill.
Through April 30

May 3

TPC's Spring Networking Event
Pez Cantina
Los Angeles

May 4

Fashion and Sustainability Summit
Maxwell Hall, LIM College
New York

There's more
on ApparelNews.net.

For calendar details and contact information, visit ApparelNews.net/calendar.

Submissions to the calendar should be faxed to the Calendar Editor at (213) 623-5707. Please include the event's name, date, time, location, admission price and contact information. The deadline for calendar submissions is the Tuesday prior to Friday publication. Inclusion in the calendar is subject to available space and the judgment of the editorial staff.

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Disruptive Retail Business Intelligence: The Shift to Self-Service and Modern Analytics

By Paula Levy Contributing Writer

For most retailers, gone are the days when data was stored in silos with multiple versions of **Excel**. Today, sources of data are centralized and can be pulled for reporting across channels and organizational areas. These include stores, online, mobile apps, email, loyalty, customer support, social media, reviews and third-party sources. Overwhelming, to be sure!

Data sources have increased, decisions are being made quicker than ever before, and information technology (IT) can no longer support the full business organization with reporting. Having common key performance indicators (KPIs) across the organization helps keep everyone sane, but there are still multiple ways to slice and dice the data. There is not a one-size-fits-all answer as it depends on the particular retail business and volume of its data.

One thing we know for sure—IT no longer owns business intelligence (BI). Sure, it is responsible for creating the centralized data from multiple sources in a data warehouse, so everyone has access, but the new data users are the business leaders within the organization, whether in finance, merchandising or at a bricks-and-mortar store. There is also a new chief in town—the chief data officer. With all the data now available, data governance, quality and security have become important and must be up to par to support the business where data sources are used instantly.

Retail BI disruption started with the addition of Visualization, providing interactive data analysis for every member of an organization down to a desktop or mobile device. Then came Machine Learning, adding the automated assistant to interpret the data against those KPIs for a “self-service” model. The newest games in town are search capability,

Natural Language Programming (NLP) and Voice technology, turning data analysis into **Alexa**- and **Siri**-like analytics where all you need to know is how to ask the right question.

IDC, a leading industry marketing-analysis firm in Massachusetts, observes that 75 percent of workers whose daily tasks involve the use of enterprise applications will have access to intelligent personal assistants to augment skills and expertise. **Gartner**, a premier industry-analyst firm out of Connecticut, predicts that by 2020, 50 percent of analytical queries will be generated via search, NLP or Voice. Gartner actually created a new segment for analytics—Modern Analytics. All of these new tools are sitting on top of the traditional data warehouse for a modern approach accessible to all workers for instant, actionable data.

The power of data for retailers is plentiful for understanding consumer shopper behavior, acquisition of customers and predicting merchandising trends. Imagine the CEO driving to work and asking a mobile device what sales occurred, which were the best products and what customer segment made which purchase. This is not the future; it’s the present—interactive, actionable data that tells a story through digitally assisted analytics that can answer questions by churning through data in minutes, if not seconds.

Traditional and modern BI companies now fall into two segments, according to Gartner, and many retailers will use more than one, depending on the size and type of retailer.

Let’s look at a few retailers that have seen benefits leveraging their data in the new, modern world of analytics.

Sephora, a leading retail cosmetics brand based in San Francisco, is a data-driven company that delivers analytics to store professionals with **SAP Roambi**, an analytics and business intelligence mobile app. It saved employees

150,000 hours a year by alleviating the back office from analyzing data. Sephora has also leveraged customer and product data to drive personalization across marketing campaigns with two leading customer-focused analytics solutions from **Adobe** and **Microsoft PowerBI**.

IBM Watson was used to create the **Under Armour UA Record** app. The cognitive coaching app provides users with real-time, data-based coaching. It takes customer input data on sleep, fitness, activity and nutrition and combines it with external data to determine factors such as weather and environment on a personalized geo basis. The data provides Under Armour, a manufacturer of athletic apparel in Maryland, with customer insights and the ability to do micro-segmentation.

Peter Glenn, a specialty outdoor retail chain based in Vermont, uses **AgilOne Analytics** to view data from online and offline channels to drive segmentation of its customer base. Advanced segmentation and more personalization based on customer lifestyle data combined with shopping behaviors provided a 30 percent increase in AOV (average order value).

Why move into the modern world of analytics? In a fast-paced retail world where consumers are connected all the time and decisions must be made in the moment, the power of data needs to be in the hands of decision-makers within an organization.

Get on the data journey and use your data to tell a story that will benefit your company, employees and customers. ●

Paula Levy is the Chief Strategy Officer for Demand Worldwide. She is a business technology strategist whose focus today is assisting retailers and brands in transforming their marketing and customer-engagement strategies with adoption of new technologies and business practices.

TRADE SHOW REPORT

Fashion Market Northern California Reports Good Biz Despite Snow

By Andrew Asch Retail Editor

SAN MATEO, Calif.—Snow and hail fell on parts of the San Francisco Bay Area on April 16, but it didn’t put much of a damper on business at the **Fashion Market Northern California** trade show, vendors and show management said.

Space was sold out at the recent run of the show, which ran April 15–17 at the **San Mateo County Event Center**, which is about a 40-minute drive south of San Francisco. Stephanie Harris, president of the executive committee of the board of show vendors that runs FMNC, detected a slight dip

in attendance Monday, the date of the most inclement weather. “Overall, it was a very busy show,” Harris said. “Sunday was crazy.” At FMNC, Harris represented brands **Habitat**, **Clothing** and **Caite** as well as **Kyla Seo** and **Love Kyla**, which are divisions of Caite.

Another vendor, Stuart Marcher, also said traffic was busy throughout the three-day run of FMNC. Busy traffic also brought good business. He estimated that his sales increased 10 percent compared to his FMNC show of April

2017. At this edition, he introduced sweater line **Unwine**, with a wholesale price range of \$59 to \$195. “We launched late,” he said of the line. “Most sweater dollars have already been spent, but it was something they have not seen, and they are making room for it.” He represents **Julie & Stuart Marcher Ltd.**

Lilly Stamets, a retail consultant who walked FMNC, said show attendance was good because the economy is fairly good. “I don’t think I’ve seen a more upbeat season for buying,” Stamets said. Stamets, who runs **Premier Retail Consulting**, also noted that business at trade shows serving Northern California stores should be good. It’s the home of

runs five times a year, and the April and October shows are typically the busiest. For this show, Mary Taft, FMNC’s executive director, said that it attracted some out-of-state shops hailing from Alaska, Oklahoma, Idaho and Arizona.

Ute Wegmann, chairwoman of the FMNC board, said that her organization has been looking to do increased buyer outreach on behalf of the show. Deals include paying for one night of hotel stays for buyers traveling to the show for the first time. Wegmann ran two 20-by-20 booths at FMNC. One booth was devoted to goods for immediate delivery. The other was devoted to Fall goods, with deliveries that start July 1. She represented brands including **Fraas**, a German scarf



Ellen Brook booth



Rock Flower Paper booth

Silicon Valley, one of the powerhouses of the U.S. economy. There is confidence in the wider economy. While the influential Consumer Confidence Index dipped in March, consumer outlook continues to be favorable, said Lynne Franco, director of economic indicators at **The Conference Board**, which maintains the index.

FMNC mostly attracts independent boutiques from the San Francisco Bay Area and across Northern California. It is devoted to women’s fashions, accessories and gifts. It

and wrap line; **Lauer Gloves**; and **CoFi**, a Mexican leather accessories line.

Jeanette Clarey, founder of the 1,400-square-foot **J.Fermi**, a women’s boutique in Petaluma, Calif., also shopped the show. She saw trends such as polka dots on tops, faux-fur jackets and a focus on the color navy. “There was navy everywhere—on beautiful, long jackets and tops,” Clarey said.

The next FMNC is scheduled to run June 24–26 in San Mateo. It will focus on the Fall II season. ●

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Kelly Sterling



Kore Collective San Francisco shop

Kore Collective Develops Its Activewear Business on Many Fronts

By Andrew Asch *Retail Editor*

Last year, **Kore Collective** formally launched its business with a website that focused on emerging and established activewear brands for the fitness buff who wants everything cool in workout gear.

By the end of last year, the e-commerce site had branched out into a bricks-and-mortar location at 1832 Union St. in San Francisco's hip Cow Hollow district, taking a page from old retail playbooks to build its business.

Kelly Sterling, the founder of Kore Collective, said opening a physical space is a key part of her business, believing that stores will eventually make up 50 percent of

her revenues as she expands.

As always, location, location, location is a key component in retail, and Sterling's 500-square-foot store is in a prime area where many fitness studios are located. Some of her neighbors are activewear retailers, including **Lululemon Athletica**.

"People coming into Kore Collective say, 'We've been shopping at big-brand stores. We prefer unique, small businesses,'" Sterling said. San Franciscans like their independent retailers so much that in 2006, the city's voters passed a ballot initiative to scale back chain retail.

Her venture also benefits from selling a clothing category that is still popular among shoppers. Market researchers **The NP Group** out of Port Washington, N.Y., noted

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that athleisure is a bright spot in the fashion business.

"Non-activewear sales declined while activewear apparel continued on its growth trajectory in 2017, although not making as steep a rise as in past years," The NPD Group said in a Feb. 21 report. "Sales of both men's and women's activewear grew in 2017, but women's supplied much of the energy behind the category's growth, reaching \$21.9 billion in sales with a 4 percent increase over 2016."

A store and e-commerce presence are only two parts of the Kore Collective operation. Sterling said everything counts in her business: digital commerce, social media, physical stores and personal appearances.

Sterling and her team frequently take Kore Collective's show on the road, producing trunk shows and going to wellness and fitness events across the San Francisco Bay Area.

"Our store is mobile," she said. "We launched with e-commerce. We have the store experience. A lot of our sales come from **Instagram**. We take our **iPads** and card readers everywhere. I'll be at a studio on a Saturday or a Sunday. I'll meet someone and they'll ask us to put something aside for them. We do a lot of face-time shopping with customers," Sterling said, noting she talks to shoppers on **Facebook's Facetime** app. "We try to take the boutique experience to people, whether they are in San Francisco or not. You've got to be scrappy. You have to use all of the resources at your disposal. You need to go and engage the customer where they are. You can't expect the customer to come to you."

The boutique on Union Street also works as an events space and community center for things including meditation and well-

ness events. It also will be hosting a running club led by Jenni Dubman, whose Instagram page, *sherunssf*, documents Dubman's running regimen. Dubman is a store client and Sterling sought to do a project with her.

Fitness teachers around the city also model different looks for the Kore Collective website at www.korecollective.com. "They become advocates of the brand," Sterling said.

Appearing on the site has its own cachet for the fitness teachers, Sterling said. "They build a social following. Content is more important than money sometimes," she said.

Sterling started her fashion career by producing digital advertising and social media for fashion and beauty brands in New York City. She also taught yoga fitness and published her personal activewear and fitness blog, called "Kore by Kelly."

When she moved to San Francisco three years ago, she saw a city that was obsessed with fitness but felt it was behind in activewear fashions. A lot of emerging activewear brands had not made it to Bay Area stores yet, she said.

So she started setting up boutiques at various studios. The venture snowballed into the multi-brand shop Kore Collective, where she is the sole owner.

Kore Collective carries established brands such as **Koral**, headquartered in Los Angeles, and stocks emerging brands such as **ALALA**. Later this year, it will carry **Olympia Activewear** and **Live the Process**.

Along with activewear, the retailer carries handbags and also focuses on "sweat-to-street" clothes, or athleisure garments, including puffer vests, tunics and dresses that can be worn outside the gym. In the next few months, the store will stock skin-care products. ●



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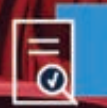
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Style Fashion Week Makes a Splash in Palm Springs

Style Fashion Week gallivants around the world, producing fashion shows in Los Angeles, New York, Dubai and other locations, but it hadn't visited the desert community of Palm Springs, Calif., since November 2016.

With a flurry, the show's founder, Veronica Welch Kerzner, set off to ramp up the runway again and showcase fashion from mostly California designers who took to the runway

April 5–8 at the **Palm Springs Air Museum**.

The opening-night ceremonies kicked off at the **V Hotel** with a live performance by the band **Missing Persons**.

On the runway were California-based designers Mario De La Torre, Merlin Castell, Richard Hallmarq and David Tupaz as well as brands **Bohimi Couture**, **Glaudi** and **House of Grayling Purnell**.—*Deborah Belgium*

Andre Emery



ALBERT EVANGELISTA

Andrew Christian



MARK GUNTER

Bohimi Couture



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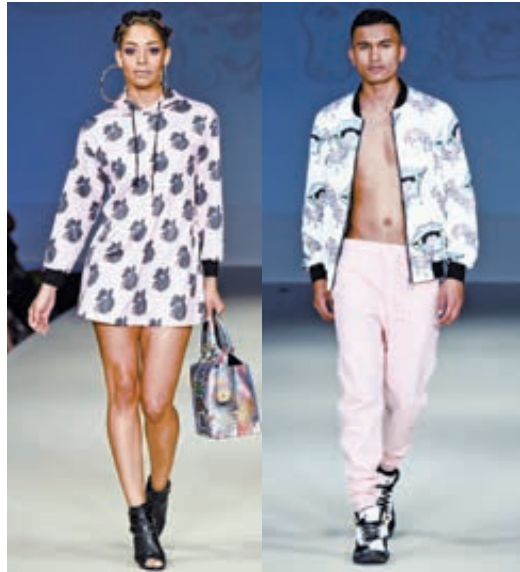
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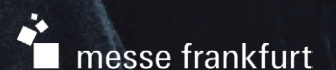
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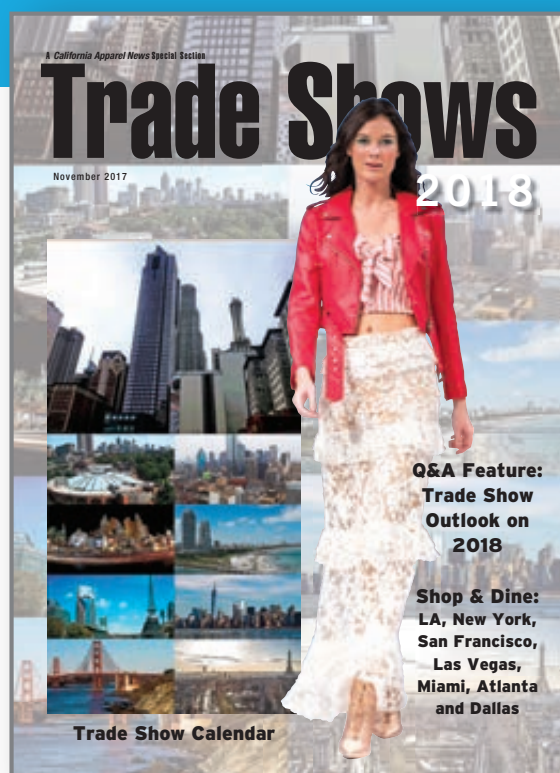
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FINANCE

Quarterly Finance *Continued from page 1*

were out. Now that the other members have signed the accord, he wants back in.

Despite all these uncertainties, consumers keep spending, jobs are being created and the economy marches along.

"Sixty-one percent of families told us last month that since Jan. 1 they are making more money through lower taxes or they got a pay raise or they went from a part-time to a full-time job," said Britt Beemer, a retail analyst and founder of **America's Research Group**, which polls 1,200 consumers a week to take the pulse of their retail-spending habits and attitudes. "Those numbers were never more than 11 percent under Obama."

Spending got off to a slower start this year because tax refunds didn't appear in mailboxes until Feb. 20, Beemer said, because the **Internal Revenue Service** was figuring out the tax tables under the new tax cut. Last year, refunds started dribbling in on Feb. 7.

Beemer said consumers spent their tax refunds on various items. "In past years, something would jump out. This year, it was doing home improvements, buying furniture and buying used cars. The tax refunds did not drive new car sales. I think new-car prices have priced themselves out for a lot of consumers," he said.

Despite the roller-coaster ride experienced in the stock markets, retail sales had a good March. The **National Retail Federation** reported that sales were up 5 percent in March compared with last year. Clothing and clothing-accessories stores saw a 6.1 percent uptick year over year, and general-merchandise stores did a little bit better with a 6.3 percent increase for the same period. "Consumers continue to show resiliency in spending, and these numbers reflect how the economy is performing with a strong job market, gains in wages, improvements in confidence, rising home values and judicious use of credit," said Jack Kleinhenz, the NRF's chief economist. "The biggest risk to spending is in market fluctuations that could affect confidence, but we expect these basic improvements in economic fundamentals to continue."

But Ron Friedman, a partner and co-leader of retail services with accounting firm **Marcum LLP** in Los Angeles, points out that the **Dow Jones Industrial Average** is still up 33 percent since President Trump took office more than a year ago. "I ask my clients and they say business is pretty good out there right now," he said. "I have a men's suit business client who has been in business for 60 years. He said that all of a sudden slim suits are in and business is up with younger customers. Mark Wertz, who owns **American Rag**, said business is up."

More help wanted

No one sees job growth decreasing. Unemployment rates around the country continue to hit all-time lows. In California, the state's 4.3

percent unemployment rate is the lowest it has been since 1976. Los Angeles County's unemployment rate is at 4.5 percent, which hasn't happened for 25 years.

"The good news for the first quarter of this year is that we have actually seen some acceleration in job creation nationally and state-wise, which was a bit unexpected," said Robert Kleinhenz, the executive director of research at **Beacon Economics** in Los Angeles, whose brother is Jack Kleinhenz at the National Retail Federation. "There is no shortage of job openings."

Job expansion is still on the horizon, with home healthcare, electronic shipping, and mail order and service-industry positions seeing the strongest growth. Department-store employment is expected to decline by about 2 percent in the next six years, and apparel manufacturing jobs will decrease by about 20 percent by 2024, according to estimates from the state **Employment Development Department**.

The nation's gross domestic product—which measures all goods and services in the country—will be egged on by the recent tax cut. It is predicted to grow at 2.8 percent compared to 2.3 percent last year.

APPAREL AND TEXTILE EMPLOYMENT

LOS ANGELES COUNTY	Feb. 2018	Feb. 2017
Apparel manufacturing	29,800	32,500
Textile mills	4,700	5,000
CALIFORNIA		
Apparel manufacturing	39,400	42,300
Textile mills	6,200	6,700

Source: California Employment Development Department

Inflation is not expected to be a major issue this year either, economists said. Rising oil prices often are predictors of inflation, but oil is at about \$70 a barrel and is not expected to go above that because the United States is now a bigger oil producer with domestic drilling filling in the gap. Ten years ago, oil was selling at nearly \$100 a barrel.

However, talk of tariffs could disrupt trade, affecting the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach—the largest port complex in the United States. About one-third of all the cargo-container traffic arriving in the country goes through those two ports.

Last year, the two ports had banner years. The **Port of Los Angeles** set a record with 9.3 million 20-foot cargo containers crossing its docks, which was a 5.5 percent increase from 2016. Next door at the **Port of Long Beach**, another record was set with 7.5 million containers being loaded and unloaded, an 11 percent jump over the previous year.

"The U.S. economy is not at risk for a downturn regarding trade, but there is uncertainty in the air from these statements coming out of Washington, D.C.," Robert Kleinhenz said. "So far, the only tariffs that have gone into effect are aluminum and steel. Everything else is proposed. ●"

TECHNOLOGY

Digital Summit *Continued from page 1*

Neiman Marcus serves its customers by introducing innovative technology to simplify shopping. An incentive to investing in a strong digital platform is the e-commerce growth that could occur through helping customers facilitate their shopping experiences.

"Our e-commerce business is worth about 33 to 34 percent of total revenue today, which is our biggest store, essentially," revealed Emmons. "It's a billion-dollar business for us. We think it's going to be 50 percent of our business as that business continues to grow by leaps and bounds."

Launched two and a half years ago, Neiman's Memory Mirror allows customers to

record videos of themselves trying on clothes through an in-store kiosk that includes a 70-inch screen. Customers can view multiple outfits from every angle and compare options without input from another person. If desired, these recordings can be shared with others via email, text and social media.

With its blended-technology initiative, Neiman Marcus is using innovation to make the customer experience seamless and enjoyable.

Be smart when building relationships

Retailers should also look beyond the apparel industry for digital inspiration. At the lunch keynote panel, "Consumer Behavior and the Future of Content Creation," on April

TECHNOLOGY

11, attendees gained valuable insight regarding how to digitally cultivate meaningful customer relationships. The panel included Jessica Coen, senior vice president and editor-in-chief of **Mashable**; the cofounder of **Netflix** and chief executive officer of **MoviePass**, Mitch Lowe; and Alison Wyatt, president of **Girlboss**. Moderated by *Hollywood Life* President and Editor-in-Chief Bonnie Fuller, the session started with a discussion regarding how to reassure customers that their information is protected while explicitly outlining policies.

"The good news is that we've always complied with our terms and conditions," Lowe said. "The bad news is that people don't understand the terms and conditions, so we're [developing this] effort of turning this archaic small print into video vignettes."

When creating content, retailers must also remain cognizant of the ways in which their customers consume media.

"The platform matters," explained Coen. "When we develop videos, we think about the method of storytelling first. Something that works on **YouTube** might have to be told in a completely different way for **Instagram**—or not told at all."

Selling a message digitally isn't simply about sharing media that sells units; it requires retailers to reveal the experiences that their products can provide to consumers. By using online tools in this way, retailers will show a genuine effort to understand the needs of their customers rather than just pushing a sales pitch.

"We're firm believers that format follows function, so the way that we really think about video is that we want to make sure that it has a very explicit purpose," Wyatt said.

Adding value through shared principles

During the final session of the conference, Emily Schmid, the director of digital content at

Walmart, and Michael Wallen, the chief content officer of the creative agency **Omelet**, discussed going "Beyond the Shopping Cart: How Walmart Uses Its Brand Values to Reconnect."

As part of Walmart's campaign to gain more public trust, the corporation is highlighting its role as a responsible agent for positive change. Building upon its long-standing slogan, "Save Money. Live Better," Walmart is supporting these words through action. With 270 million people per week shopping at Walmart locations across 5,000 communities, the company wants to help its customers live better.

"Shared value benefits our business but also everyone who intersects with us on a daily basis," Schmid said. "Today, more than ever, that is really important. People want to know not just what you're selling but who you really are, especially in the information age."

Research has shown that 79 percent of consumers make purchasing decisions based on the level of attention they feel a brand devotes to their needs, according to Schmid. She went on to explain the reasons 89 percent of those surveyed will remain loyal to companies that reflect their values.

"Trust is more important these days, and talking about that in an authentic way is hard, but it's worth it," Schmid said.

With the rising popularity of podcasts, Walmart decided to engage customers by producing its "Outside the Box" channel, which discusses interests shared by and issues faced by consumers, thereby strengthening its relationships through building confidence.

"Perceptions are created when you don't have the information," explained Wallen. "Our ultimate goal is obviously to make sure that people understand what we're doing, why we're doing it and do it in a way that they truly engage with so those perceptions become understanding." ●

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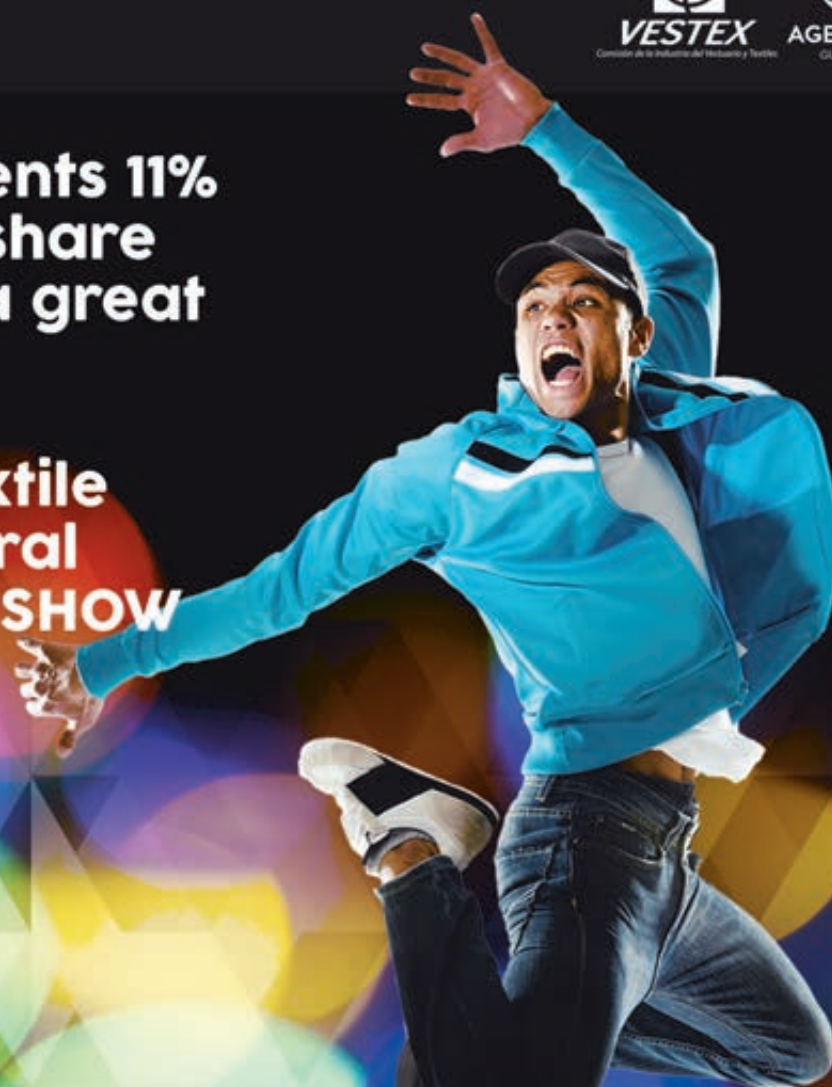
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