

# CALIFORNIA ApparelNews

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY FOR 75 YEARS

\$3.99 VOLUME 76, NUMBER 22 SEPTEMBER 18, 2020 DOUBLE ISSUE



## NEW APPROACH TO NYFW

For the September 2020 edition of New York Fashion Week, Tadashi Shoji invited viewers into a filmed showcase of his Spring/Summer 2021 collection that was set in a fantastic tropical forestland as models appeared in finely detailed pieces from the designer. For additional styles from NYFW, see page 9.

DOVE SHORE/TADASHI SHOJI

### INDUSTRY FOCUS: FINANCE

## How the Apparel Industry Can Hold On for the Holidays

By Dorothy Crouch *Managing Editor*

As business restrictions stemming from COVID-19 continue to ease across the United States and unemployment has fallen into the single digits at 8.4 percent, yet employment remains at 11.5 million jobs below February's figures, and the gross domestic product in the country also decreased at an annual rate of 31.7 percent during the second quarter.

During this third quarter of 2020, the country is also experiencing its share of natural disasters and threatening weather. Destructive wildfires have decimated millions of acres in the Western region. As hurricane season enters its final few months, Southern states and those along the Eastern seaboard also must prepare for the worst while hoping for the best.

Considering the condition of the United States economy, emergency relief and the loss of typical back-to-school revenue ➔ **Finance** page 4

### TRADE EVENTS

## Informa Markets Fashion Makes a Successful Move to Digital During Launch

By Andrew Asch and Dorothy Crouch

Launching Sept. 1, **Informa Markets Fashion** allowed the show to go on with its digital trade event that saw its **MAGIC** anchor and sibling shows run online through the **NuOrder** platform. Following an announcement in July that the onsite apparel-and-fashion trade events, originally planned to be hosted at the **Las Vegas Convention Center** in August and rescheduled for September, would be canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Informa began working to build a digital event with the Los Angeles-headquartered business-to-business e-commerce platform NuOrder.

"This show season, **MAGIC Digital** is showcasing a wide variety of product for the women's young contemporary and trend buyers," said Kelly Helfman, president of ➔ **Informa** page 12

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Where fashion gets down to business<sup>SM</sup>

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## AAFA's Lamar Testifies on Stopping Chinese Forced Labor

Steve Lamar, the president and chief executive officer of the trade group **American Apparel & Footwear Association**, testified Sept. 17 on steps American fashion-and-apparel companies can take to stop forced labor in China's Xinjiang province.

For more than five years, groups such as **Human Rights Watch** have said that the communist government has created a gulag of internment camps for the Muslim Uyghur group to indoctrinate them and crush their culture. Forced labor has been documented in these camps.

Lamar testified on "Enforcing the Ban on Imports Produced by Forced Labor in Xinjiang" before the United States House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee Trade Subcommittee. Lamar said the problem is massive. About 20 percent of the world's

cotton is sourced in Xinjiang. He also requested government help to combat the issue.

"We are on the front lines of this battle, making sure that workers are safely, responsibly, legally and voluntarily employed. We are constantly pioneering new methods and technologies to thwart forced labor," he told the subcommittee.

However, his group's members couldn't handle the issue alone. "Much is written about the economic leverage of the apparel and footwear industry and its ability to influence the Chinese government. I wish these assertions were true, but they are not. The situation in [Xinjiang] is of a scale, scope and complexity that is unprecedented in modern supply chains. Moreover, forced labor, as horrendous as it is, is only one component of a much larger campaign of repression. These

are state-sponsored programs and they are extensive. They require state-sponsored solutions," he said.

He also recommended proceeding carefully with any sanction tools. One such sanction discussed was a withhold-release-order announcement that would declare all cotton sourced from Xinjiang to be tainted by forced labor. Lamar said that such a sanction would only end up doing more harm than good. He believed such a WRO order would create havoc in legitimate supply chains and hamper economic development in a global economy already hurt by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lamar recommended to the subcommittee that it focus on strengthening global coalitions with the United Nations to pressure the Chinese government to stop forced labor.

—Andrew Asch

## Ashton Hirota to Judge Newchic 2020 Designer Contest

Ashton Hirota has gained notice as a designer for his Los Angeles-headquartered brand **Ashton Michael** and as a semifinalist in the fashion reality competition show "Next in Fashion." For his next gig, he will serve as a judge for the recently announced Newchic 2020 Designer Contest, which started taking applications on Sept. 14.

Hirota will judge the submissions with Paula Franco, a professor at Los Angeles' **Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising**. Contest winners will be honored with cash awards and a manufacturing sponsorship from **Newchic**, a fashion brand headquartered in Hong Kong.

Hirota was impressed with the generosity of the contest. "They are not just saying you

are a good designer. They are saying that we believe in you enough to say that they will invest in you. They're taking a risk on you. It's an incredible opportunity for a designer," said Hirota, who is the chief executive officer of Ashton Michael, which makes a couture line of the same name and the ready-to-wear line **Ash**.

In a statement, Newchic described its mission as disrupting the fast-fashion market by focusing on individuality and socially conscious fashions, said Le Zou, Newchic's president.

"We understand that fashion designers are artists, driven by celebrating individuality and unique points of view through their designs. Newchic wants to help the fashion industry

reset and refocus on self-expression as the utmost pinnacle of fashion. We are thrilled to see what contestants have in store over the next few weeks," said Le Zou.

Established and new designers are encouraged to enter. On Oct. 6, ten semifinalists will be announced. Their designs will be professionally photographed on models. Winners will be announced Oct. 24. Cash prizes will be \$1,000 for the first-place winner, \$600 for the second-place winner and \$300 for the third-place winner.

For more information, visit [newchic.com/designers](http://newchic.com/designers) or contact Wengui Cai at [caiwen-gui@newchic.com](mailto:caiwen-gui@newchic.com)—A.A.

## California Apparel News Retail Editor Andrew Asch Recognized by L.A. Press Club

During an Aug. 29 video broadcast, the **Los Angeles Press Club** hosted its 62nd annual Southern California Journalism Awards. Among the winners, *California Apparel News*' own Andrew Asch, who has served as the publication's retail editor since 2003 and won third place in the category of "Business Story in Print with Circulation under 50,000" for his February 7, 2020, story "Trinidad3 Plans to Serve Wounded Warriors With Fashion and Function."

The article told the story of how the Los Angeles-made denim brand **Trinidad3** expanded its mission to support veterans of the United States armed forces. Trinidad3's founder, Trinidad Garcia III, himself a former U.S. Marine Corps sergeant, explained in the piece how a new jean design that his company had developed would ease dressing for leg amputees. Working with Marine veteran Josue Barron, a leg amputee, Trinidad3 developed a jean with a 12-inch zippered seam located on the upper thigh that facilitates the adjustment of prosthetic limbs. Asch's story also revealed the background story of Barron, a Los Angeles-raised Purple Heart recipient who lost his left leg and left eye following an incident during which his patrol detonated an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan in 2010.

"For the first time in years, Barron could feel less self-conscious. It was proof that fashion can make a difference in people's lives," Asch said.—Dorothy Crouch



## Inside the Industry

Following media reports on Sept. 14 that Redwood City, Calif., software firm Oracle Corp. had beaten out Microsoft in the bid for the China-based social-media platform TikTok's operations in the United States, Bloomberg reported Sept. 17 that terms had been agreed upon for the deal to move forward. The United States Treasury Department, Bytedance Ltd.—TikTok's owner—and Oracle agreed to terms that were outlined Wednesday as all parties attempt to make arrangements to quell security concerns of the United States government. According to Bloomberg, the deal outlines Oracle's minority stake in a new United States-headquartered company, TikTok Global, which would include an independent, U.S.-government-approved board comprising citizens of the country and a national security committee whose purpose would be to preserve data security.

**Denim trade-event producer Kingpins** is heading to Canada for a virtual edition of its Kingpins24 show. The two-hour event, to be hosted Sept. 22, will feature a collaboration with Ani Wells of Simply Suzette. The Kingpins brand revealed that the shift from a multi-day livestream of eight hours of content was a response to its denim community's desire for brief virtual gatherings to complement the larger online shows. "Kingpins continues to explore digital ideas and opportunities, and we are excited to collaborate with Ani on Kingpins24 Canada. As a Canadian, it is refreshing for me to be able to shine a spotlight on my homeland—which rarely features in conversations about denim but is home to a lot of interesting and engaged denim players," Andrew Olah, founder of Kingpins and Kingpins24, said.

**Brand owner, marketer and media company Marquee Brands** announced the appointment of veteran fashion executive Neil Fiske as its first chief executive officer. Marquee Brands' portfolio includes Dakine, Body Glove, BCBG, Martha Stewart, Ben Sherman, Bruno Magli and Sur La Table. Founded in 2014, Marquee Brands is owned by investor funds that are managed by Neuberger Berman, according to Sam Porat, managing director. "We are very excited to have him lead the team as the company's first chief executive officer. Neil has the leadership track record and breadth of business experience we believe are critical to lead Marquee," Porat said. Most recently, Fiske served as president and chief executive officer of the Gap, Inc. brand. He left Gap in February. Previously, he served as CEO of the surf brand Billabong International and the president and CEO of the Eddie Bauer brand.

**Northbrook, Ill.-headquartered Hilco Merchant Resources** announced the appointment of former Tommy Hilfiger Handbags and Accessories and Oscar by Oscar de la Renta executive Charles M. Jayson as executive vice president of retail business development. At the management-consulting firm, Jayson will work in the consumer sector, structuring transactions with retailers and consumer-product companies to maximize return on excess assets in addition to advising on product development, merchandising, supply chain, global distribution and licensing. Throughout Jayson's 30-year career, he has also worked in executive positions with **S.T. Dupont**, **Andrew Marc Outerwear**, **Judith Ripka Jewelry** and **Sears Women**.

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## Finance *Continued from page 1*

enue for this year, *California Apparel News* asked finance-industry experts: *How should the apparel industry approach the final quarter of the year as we enter the holiday season?*

### **Darrin Beer, Western Regional Manager, Commercial Services, CIT**

While we have seen a positive increase in the recent employment figures, millions remain unemployed, which ultimately impacts discretionary spending. The \$600 per week of enhanced unemployment benefits ended July 31, placing a further strain on households. Apparel manufacturers have had a difficult time navigating through back-to-school as parents and students were faced with the likelihood of remote studies from home. Some spending went toward desks and related accessories and electronics such as computers and laptops. Spending on clothing was concentrated online, with consumers favoring comfort and athleisure while studying and working from home.

Retailers are countering the decline in traffic by emphasizing online sales and curbside or in-store pickup. In some instances, the manufacturer is being asked by the retailer to support its online strategy by shipping to the consumer directly and then billing the retailer. In this case, the manufacturer is asked to carry several SKUs and incur all the handling costs related to servicing individual customer orders purchased on the retailer's website. Investing in technology and processes will not only help service immediate orders, but it can also improve a brand's own digital strategy.

It's hard to predict the status of store reopenings during the fourth quarter. Given the level of uncertainty, retailers will likely play it safe for the holiday season by ordering cautiously and taking fewer risks. When COVID-19 is under control, I believe more consumers will resume shopping at bricks-and-mortar stores, and apparel sales will improve over prior months. We may even see a burst of pent-up demand for shopping as people get out of their homes after a long period of isolation. Of course, this activity will depend upon economic factors including employment rates and household incomes. Until then, expense and inventory management are critical while focusing on internal processes and efficiencies.

**"Retailers are countering the decline in traffic by emphasizing online sales and curbside or in-store pickup. In some instances, the manufacturer is being asked by the retailer to support its online strategy by shipping to the consumer directly and then billing the retailer."— Darrin Beer**

### **Mark Bienstock, Managing Director, Express Trade Capital**

As we all are aware, apparel at the retail level has been one of the hardest-hit categories. The number of bankruptcies related to apparel appear to lead the charge. The most efficient way for apparel manufacturers to handle this crisis is to create a virtual-showroom platform along with emphasizing their ability to sell through the various e-commerce platforms. In addition, only those well-capitalized companies or companies

that have a longstanding relationship with overseas factories that can provide open credit will be the long-term survivors.

### **Sydnee Breuer, Executive Vice President, Western Region Manager, Rosenthal & Rosenthal**

While the economy remains challenged and inconsistent at best, the artificial stimuli (PPP and EIDL loans, extra unemployment benefits and the like) have certainly kept consumer spending up. It may not be on the trajectory expected pre-COVID-19, but the apparel industry has had some time to adapt and readjust its designs and factory orders, and that has made a difference.

The challenges facing the industry are still very much geographic, with certain parts of the country fully open and others still experiencing a significant level of shutdown. But there are some bright spots, especially among companies that have invested in their own e-commerce platforms and have sold to stores that also sell essential products.

The key to success in the apparel industry as we head into Q4 (as well as with other industries) is being as flexible and as nimble as possible. Inventory levels and expenses must be in line with a likely unpredictable and/or inconsistent holiday sales season. When you do get an order, you need to be sure the retailer will be able to pay the invoice when it's due. With the number of retail bankruptcies on the rise, you'd be wise to have a factor or credit-insurance coverage in place to help mitigate your risk. But most important of all, stay safe and know we will get through this!

### **Gino Clark, Executive Vice President and Managing Director of Originations, White Oak Commercial Finance, LLC**

At White Oak, we believe the apparel industry should focus on the basics while keeping expenses and inventories down. Being resourceful in daily business decisions is essential as we've watched companies of varying sizes maintain a conservative expense structure while adapting to a virtual model to meet their clients' needs in an unprecedented market. It is this type of creativity and discipline that will be critical during the holiday season.

Understanding counterparty risk is critical across industries, and it is acutely important for the apparel sector. We strongly encourage our clients to expand their sourcing and develop strategies to navigate counterparty risk as bankruptcy announcements continue to be prevalent.

Knowing your trade cycle and its impact on liquidity will return near and long-term results, especially as retailers are demanding increased terms, so verify that your lender will support corresponding increases in customer concentration and working-capital requirements to keep operations flowing and to provide room to pivot as needed.

Last and most importantly, we recommend that apparel businesses keep clear and consistent communications with their customers, employees, accountants, suppliers and industry network. Listen to what is happening in the marketplace, vet and adopt successful trends, reach out to your business community, CPA and lender for support, and be a constructive resource to fellow business owners as we are all in this together.

### **Eric Fisch, Senior Vice President, National Sector Head, Retail and Apparel, HSBC Bank USA N.A.**

While the pandemic and economic situation have created significant uncertainty, the past six months have begun to pro-

vide salient trends that are valuable for retail and apparel businesses to use as guides for the coming season. While spending is down year over year, it has rebounded as consumers develop a routine. This new normal comes with changes in lifestyle and what clothing consumers need, therefore altering product demand.

A shift from formalwear to athleisure and a shift in channel preference to online from bricks-and-mortar are two stark examples. Additionally, within each category we have seen more-nuanced changes in consumer preference, but enough time has elapsed to begin seeing consistency. Using this data to plan for the fourth quarter and holidays is the best bet for being prepared. Even with a clear plan, conservatism will continue to prevail, which will make it difficult for anyone to show a truly outstanding performance while also protecting against significant excess inventory.

**"While the economy remains challenged and inconsistent at best, the artificial stimuli (PPP and EIDL loans, extra unemployment benefits and the like) have certainly kept consumer spending up. It may not be on the trajectory expected pre-COVID-19, but the apparel industry has had some time to adapt and readjust their designs and factory orders, and that has made a difference."— Sydnee Breuer**

### **Ronald S. Friedman, Partner, Marcum LLP**

The U.S. economy is expected to have a nice increase during the fourth quarter. I have heard estimates ranging from 20 percent to 35 percent growth over the third quarter. With these optimistic projections, manufacturers need to be ready to meet the needs of their customers, but caution is required. I would not recommend stocking up on inventory to meet the demands. Stick with what has been working in the past, buy inventory against orders, and don't speculate.

Many of our clients at Marcum are seeing that, with lower staff levels, the businesses are operating just fine. As sales begin to increase, there is no need to expand the overhead to pre-COVID-19 levels. This will be the new business model going forward. Apparel companies should not need to hit pre-COVID-19 sales levels to be profitable.

### **Rob Greenspan, President and Chief Executive, Greenspan Consult, Inc.**

The apparel industry should approach the fourth quarter and holiday season with great caution. We have to remember we are still in the middle of this pandemic. While some of the economic metrics have improved, they are compared to probably all-time lows. We still have not fully opened up the economy, and many states are still suffering COVID-19 setbacks. Some states are still in Phase 1 of reopening. Any kind of COVID-19 outbreaks could lead to setbacks. So everyone must be cautious and not bullish that it is business as usual.

There are still retailers who continue to struggle financially. I don't believe we have seen the last of the retail bankruptcies.

**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to: CALIFORNIA APPAREL NEWS, Customer Service, PO Box 4419, Orlando, FL 32802. **CALIFORNIA APPAREL NEWS** (ISSN 0008-0896) Published by TLM PUBLISHING INC. APPAREL NEWS GROUP Publishers of: *California Apparel News*, *Market Week Magazine*, *New Resources*, *Waterwear*, *New York Apparel News*, *Dallas Apparel News*, *Apparel News South*, *Chicago Apparel News*, *The Apparel News (National)*, *Bridal Ap-*

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Secretary of Commerce

We should not be surprised if other major retailers turn to the bankruptcy courts for protection. Even if it's not bankruptcy, many retailers will have trouble getting their credit approved for wholesale orders. During the pandemic, retailers received extended-payment terms, and slow pay by retailers does not help the situation. Manufacturers and importers might likely have to assume their customers' credit on their own.

Optimistically thinking, I am hopeful retailers will need holiday merchandise to stock their shelves. Optimistically thinking, I am hopeful there will be pent-up demand by consumers to spend money for the 2020 holiday season. People are looking for reasons to get out, resume some form of normalcy in their daily lives and have a good holiday season.

As for the apparel industry, manufacturers and importers should be cautious and careful in their inventory purchases. I would recommend as little speculation as possible on inventory buys. I would try to get my customers' credit approved by the factor or through credit insurance so the sellers don't have the bad-debt risk of their customers' inability to pay. I recommend keeping the overhead as low as practical. Apparel manufacturers and importers need to be flexible and, of course, as liquid as possible in case the pandemic grows again instead of retreating.

## **Richard H. Kwon, Executive Vice President and Portfolio Manager, Finance One, Inc.**

The 1.4 million new jobs added in August include nearly 240,000 temporary workers the government has hired to conduct the 2020 Census. In addition, the slowing job growth (June: 4.8 million, July: 1.7 million) is an indication that businesses remain wary of broader economic recovery.

With weaker apparel sales this back-to-school season affected by remote learning, social distancing and the expiration of government stimulus across the country, the apparel industry would need to rely on the upcoming Q4 holiday season to make up revenue lost during Q1 and Q2's pandemic-induced shutdowns. With already 27 major retailers filing for bankruptcies so far this year, the competition among the retailers to stay in business is expected to be fierce. Retailers may opt to offer earlier and steeper discounts and markdowns compared to prior holiday seasons. Apparel manufacturers' profit margins may suffer as a result without careful planning and execution.

**"I am hopeful retailers will need holiday merchandise to stock their shelves. Optimistically thinking, I am hopeful there will be pent-up demand by consumers to spend money for the 2020 holiday season. People are looking for reasons to get out, resume some form of normalcy in their daily lives and have a good holiday season."— Rob Greenspan**

Opportunities exist for apparel companies that take actions to transform themselves and meet shifting consumer demands. Some companies found success by pivoting away from fast-fashion or formal/business attire to more comfort-oriented, athleisure or loungewear product lines. Others have permanently added personal protective equipment to their inventory and improved sales. Still, with so many uncertainties as COVID-19 rages on across the country and around the world, apparel companies that can best manage their liquidity, inventory, competitive pricing and trade-credit risks should survive through the pandemic and thrive.

## **Robert Meyers, President, Republic Business Credit, LLC**

Performance, discipline and persistence continue to be our advice for apparel entrepreneurs as they enter the holiday season. Performance across your supply chains, quality control and delivering early on any shipment. As supply significantly outpaces demand, retailers will seek any excuse to take a discount or a return. As an entrepreneur, you will need the discipline to keep your team focused on your strengths and being very thoughtful about which business you should sell. There will be marginal credit decisions or extended-term orders. Make sure you are working with your factoring company or bank to provide the certainty that payment is guaranteed.

Lastly, persistence will be essential as there will be more uncertainty and less predictability than ever before. If a vaccine emerges in November, people no longer socially distance or if a second wave takes hold, it will drastically change the supply chain this holiday season.

While performance, discipline and persistence are essential on the wholesale side, they are equally important for e-commerce strategies. Demand for e-commerce continues to build, creating a lot of opportunities for the apparel industry as it navigates the balance between wholesale and direct to consumer. We advise our clients to approach each week with the perspective and understanding of what they can do in the environment and make sure their supportive financing partner is prepared for the unplanned holiday season.

## **David M. Reza, Senior Vice President, Western Region, Milberg Factors, Inc.**

The U.S. economic outlook can be summed up in one word: uncertainty. The COVID-19 pandemic shows signs of abating in some areas, for example New York, while accelerating in others, for example the Northern Great Plains. In all states, infections vary from county to county with the reopening of schools, businesses and entertainment venues either on hold or slowly restarting subject to rapidly evolving public-health criteria.

Unemployment may be down from its record high, but it's still an issue. Congress is stalled on an extension of benefit support. Natural disasters in the West and South have rendered many homeless just ahead of the winter months. The reality is that millions of citizens are grappling with bigger issues than holiday buying. Of course, there are exceptions—those people who are employed and have savings can afford to splurge with dollars saved from canceled vacations, no movies and less dining out. These dynamics, coupled with the related lack of consumer confidence, present a planning challenge for all businesses and are especially relevant to the apparel and retail industries.

Against this backdrop, a bullish attitude about Q4/holiday 2020 business is hard to support. Caution is certainly warranted as retailers will look to keep in-store inventories lean in response to limited or (shudder) no foot traffic. The pandemic has been a boon to online shopping in all categories, and 30 percent of sales are expected to be online this holiday season. If there is another series of lockdowns, this number will grow. It's all the more reason for apparel wholesalers to invest in a robust e-commerce platform themselves.

For Q4, the industry needs to be attuned to five key issues. First, the guidance from its factoring resources on the financial condition of their customers. The pandemic has exacerbated the already-weak financials of many retailers. Second, the retailer's strategy relative to how it manages the consumer's in-store and online shopping and fulfillment experience. Third, sell-through data by customer and store so that wholesalers can build and ship the right inventory. Fourth, the holiday season will start earlier (Amazon Prime day) and last longer. Fifth, shipping capacity may become an issue in Q4—be prudent that late-season inventory buys and retail deliveries could

be delayed due to capacity issues. Don't get stuck with inventory or incur the risk of large returns and/or Q1 2021 markdown requests. In sum, all of the apparel industry has to be prepared for a different and likely difficult Q4/holiday 2020.

## **Ken Wengrod, Chair of Finance for the District Export Council of Southern California, appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce**

By now, it's reasonable that apparel operators are addressing changing consumer-buying habits. Some owners of businesses have been withdrawing excess money from their companies to support their bourgeois lifestyles. Justifying their sense of entitlement in this unpredictable market seems to be a common theme among owners who have been around a long time. Hanging on to the low interest rate begs the question, How will they survive this year's holiday season? Manufacturers will be going through a much-needed cleansing period that may represent a boon for apparel small to mid-size entities (SMEs), while the low interest rates will assist them with this growth.

**"But where there's turmoil there's opportunity. Inevitably, these tumultuous times will open up significant opportunities for SMEs who have made the paradigm shift to the sudden demand of the virtual online economy."**

**— Ken Wengrod**

Presently, consumers are operating remotely from their homes. COVID-19 has taught us to live with less, with more functional, comfortable and sustainable clothing. Consumers are still spending, but they are buys such as throwaway clothes, which negatively impact our environment. On a global front, people are maximizing every square inch of their living spaces. Modernizing living areas and updating communication/technology and fitness equipment have piqued consumers' interests, which has affected the type of apparel they are purchasing.

Safer at home is the mantra. Consumers are conditioned to find ways to protect themselves while in continued isolation. Working and managing families and children on learning platforms has launched contactless buying. Virtual meetings, Telemedicine, Instacart, Amazon and curbside car loading for store purchases are the signs of the times. Adapting to our ever-changing world is critical. Those that haven't been evolving may be forced to battle tough times as we approach the final quarter.

But where there's turmoil there's opportunity. Inevitably, these tumultuous times will open up significant opportunities for SMEs who have made the paradigm shift to the sudden demand of the virtual online economy. These SMEs recognize the playing field has been leveled and that they can compete with the so-called dinosaurs of the industry—touché! Today, authenticity, agility, transparency and knowing well the ultimate customer through data metrics breed the winning manufacturer. *Hasta la vista* to building excess inventory and wasting the opportunities of cheap money.

Maximizing productivity, properly utilizing technology, searching for ways to shorten trade cycles (including near- and in-shoring production), and cutting unnecessary sampling, design and sales costs are secrets to manufacturing success in the apparel world. Apparel manufacturers also need to focus on foreign markets to expand their customer base. Companies who've been able to adapt to these practices may have an opportunity to flourish through the holidays and over the next three years. ●



# From Fashion to Fasteners, Responsible Offerings in Apparel Expand

By Dorothy Crouch *Managing Editor*

Steps toward creating a more-responsible fashion industry are being taken from all segments of the supply chain to clean up one of the most-pollutive industries on the planet and satisfy the demand of consumers.

Fitchburg, Mass.-headquartered **Avery Dennison Fastener Solutions**, the materials-science and packaging company, recently unveiled its bio-PP apparel-tag fastener, which is completely biodegradable. The introduction of this product follows the April release of the company's Ecotach tag fastener fully made from recycled plastic.

"Innovation is an essential element of Avery Dennison as is providing sustainable solutions. With the fastener solution, we wanted to focus on the innovation in sustainability, especially with plastic," said Dan Riendeau, senior marketing manager of global packaging and retail. "Fasteners are everywhere. We wanted to see if we could pursue alternative solutions to the plastic tags for apparel. When you add them all up, it makes a difference."

The result of this diligent work is the company's own blend of polypropylene, which will degrade in less than one year on soil. After breaking down, the fastener will leave behind no toxic substances nor any microplastics. Following its verification by the third-party-agency **Impact Solutions**, Avery Dennison marketed the bio-PP fastener as biodegradable in less than a year, and during trials the company's team found that the product could vanish within seven months under the appropriate conditions.

"The biggest challenge we faced was managing the skepticism of a truly biodegradable product. There is always this perception that it degrades but will leave microplastics. Our third-party testing agency has been able to provide and show the data that our fasteners do not leave microplastics behind even when left in a garden or a yard or a park. They will degrade into absolutely nothing—carbon dioxide, water and biomass," Riendeau said. "It's good for the environment and it is truly breakthrough technology."

For the New York athleisure and lounge-wear brand **Grey State**, manufacturing responsibly has been a part of its core mission since 2015, when it was founded by Saima Chowdhury. Grey State's commitment to the large umbrella of sustainability led it to adopt the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals** for its goods, which are manufactured in Bangladesh through the Chowdhury family's vertical-production facilities. From ensuring the health and well-being of workers, supporting education for girls and special-needs children, and adopting ecologically sound production practices to conserve energy, reduce waste and maintain a clean water supply, Chowdhury takes seriously the task at hand.

"With sustainability, there is social and environmental on your supply side and, on your demand side, you have to think about how much you are ordering and how much stuff you are bringing in and what excess are you creating in the whole supply chain," Chowdhury said. "We've been getting more engagement from the consumer asking us about our impact and what we are doing."

In addition to working with organizations such as **Oeko-Tex**, **BSCI**, **BetterWork** and **WRAP**—through which Grey State is gold certified—the company focused on a particular area of sustainability for 2020. For Spring, the company introduced two styles that were created from recycled fabric, and for Fall Grey State increased that to 30 percent of the collection. Moving forward, at least 30 percent of Grey State's collections, which are sized 0–14 and retail from \$48 to \$138, will comprise recycled fabric.



Grey State

After launching its 4Earth collection earlier in 2020, the Culver City, Calif., shoe brand **Blowfish Malibu** expanded its sustainable initiative into its Fall/Winter 2020 collection. In addition to being made from recycled plastic bottles, the collection benefits the ocean-conservation advocacy group **Oceana** with \$1 from every 4Earth shoe purchase donated to the cause. Karen Bueno, vice president of marketing at Blowfish Malibu, explained that making changes in one collection could lay the groundwork for building a cleaner industry.

"When we decided to embark on the 4Earth collection, all we knew was that, as a brand, we wanted to be better. We knew we wouldn't be able to make an impact overnight, but we felt it was important to start. We wanted to be more environmentally conscious about what we were doing as a company," Bueno said. "We know that an estimated 300 million pairs of shoes end up in landfills every year and fully acknowledge that the footwear industry is part of that problem."

Next steps for sustainability at Blowfish Malibu include examining its packaging options.

"One of the biggest changes we are currently working on is the removal of all single-use plastics from our shoebox packaging," Bueno said. "We are looking to remove all of the single-use plastic entirely as well as to only use recycled-paper materials. We hope that this change will fully be in place by the end of the year."

As an organization whose focus is advocating for the reduction of plastic use across industries, Oceana recognizes that taking change step by step is important. Jon Frank, director of global corporate and celebrity partnerships at Oceana, sees potential for these gradual changes.

"We recognize that transitioning to a zero-waste economy isn't as simple as flipping a switch, so it's important for brands to design with a focus on reducing plastic and waste," Frank said. "Products that reduce reliance on virgin plastic are a nice start and can build momentum for moving toward zero waste."

For Bueno, the push toward sustainability has to be industrywide, and recognizing weaknesses within a commitment to sustainability is a good start. By starting with a particular area, Bueno feels change becomes easier to build upon.

"As an industry, we need to recognize that we are part of the problem and that we need to do our part to make suitable changes for future generations," Bueno said. "This is not an overnight process, but steady, consistent change is meaningful, and we're not afraid to start." ●

# Surf Expo Virtual Show Works to Capture the Spirit of In-Person Show

By Andrew Asch *Retail Editor*

**Surf Expo** was the latest trade show to produce a virtual event due to the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns. Roy Turner, the show's senior vice president, wanted to make sure that the experience of the virtual trade show, called **Surf Expo Connect**, would be as close as it could be to the spirit and the experience of the in-person event when the virtual trade show ran Sept. 16–18. Post show, Surf Expo Connect will turn into an e-marketplace scheduled to run until Nov. 11.

Like every other Surf Expo in the past 44 years, Surf Expo Connect featured keynote addresses from prominent executives. Paul Naude, founder of the independent surf brand **Vissla**, gave a talk on Sept. 16 called "Navigating the Pandemic." Chad Nelson, chief executive officer of the **Surfrider Foundation**, gave a talk on the plastics pollution crisis in the oceans. There was even a virtual happy hour. At 4 p.m. EDT each day of the show, D.J. Lance O played reggae music on a **Soundcloud** stream, Turner said.

"Things have gotten off to a good start," Turner said. "You're not going to get 100 percent of people from Surf Expo. But you're going to have the key people from all of our categories." He hoped that vendors and attendees would leave the virtual event with the same mission accomplished as an in-person event—reinforcing old relationships and forging new relationships, Turner said.

Surf Expo Connect hosted 200 brands, which included long-dominant surf brands **Billabong**, **O'Neill**, **Quiksilver**, **Rip Curl**, as well as newer, prominent brands **Roark**, **Psycho Tuna** and **Salty Crew**. Turner said that the site enjoyed 2,300 registered buyers, which included influential California surf shops **Jack's Surfboards**, **Huntington Surf & Sport**, **Sun Diego**, **Val Surf**, as well as retailers from the Caribbean, Central America and Hawaii.

Surf Expo worked with technology partner **Convey Services**, based in Atlanta, to make a virtual show that could be easily navigable and easily accessed, Turner said. Entry was free for registered buyers. Fees to produce virtual booths ranged from \$600 to \$2,000. The show's home page featured menu choices such as a page that could direct buyers to booths that were taking orders for at-once items. Other pages offered show specials, such as one offer by **Devereux Proper Threads**, headquartered in Tempe, Ariz. The company offered a 10 percent discount on 48 units of men's swimwear. There was also a special menu shortcut to find new products and individual brands.

The first day of Surf Expo Connect was great for the Los Angeles-headquartered **Psycho Tuna**, said Patricia Thornton, the brand's vice president of sales. The brand opened five new accounts. "People were emailing. They were in chatrooms," Thornton said. The brand was selling its Spring 2021 styles of boardshorts, T-shirts, fleece hoodies, hats and windbreakers. Retail price points ranged from \$26 to \$32 for tees and \$50 to \$56 for boardshorts made out of recycled **Repreve** fabric.

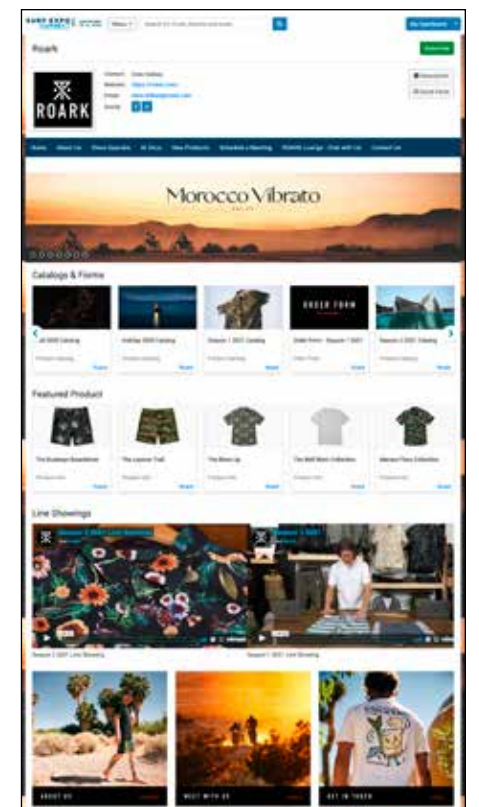
The **Tommy Bahama** brand, headquartered in Seattle, also exhibited at Surf Expo Connect. Surf Expo had always been a great show for the brand, said Peter Leff, executive vice president of Tommy Bahama Wholesale. At a typical in-person Surf Expo, the brand's salespeople would take more than 100 appointments. Surf Expo Connect was the second virtual trade show that the brand had tried. Leff considered the format to be so new that he believed that each show had served as a learning experience. "We're not going to discount opportunities to service ac-

counts in this way. If some choose to shop this way, we'll be there for them," Leff said. Business had been good for the brand during the pandemic because people have been looking at casual clothes, which is Tommy Bahama's forte. Retail price points range from \$89.50 to \$200 for the men's and women's collections.

Surf Expo's virtual show was rolled out when independent surf-and-action-sports retailers are trying to roll with the punches of the pandemic's economic freeze, said Patrik



Roy Turner



Roark Brand virtual booth on Surf Expo Connect

Schmidle, president of **ActionWatch**, a market-research company that monitors independent action-sports retailers. His company found that there was a spike in sales at the shops it monitors in June, which was due to pent-up demand. Sales slowed down in July and August for soft goods. However, sales for hard-goods items like surfboards and wet suits have continued to be robust. However, profit margins for hard goods are lower than for soft goods. "From the perspective of the bottom line, that's a challenging situation," Schmidle said.

The September 2020 Surf Expo is the third event to be canceled in the show's history. The September 2019 and September 2017 shows had been canceled due to impending hurricanes. "We've seen hurricanes and COVID, but at the end of the day we've been able to accommodate our customers through the cancellations," Turner said. An in-person Surf Expo has been scheduled for Jan. 6–8 in Orlando, Fla. He forecasted that Surf Expo Connect will operate at future shows as a supplement to in-person shows. ●

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## FALL/WINTER 2021-2022 TRENDS



## New in Knits: Cozy Layers in Luxurious Fabrications and Ethical Materials

By Peclers Paris

This season, knits are layered and wrap us in minimalist luxury, creating a comforting cocoon adapted to the current context. Comfort, yes, as well as femininity! Accepting and highlighting the body to prolong summer sensuality. Consequently, knits perfectly and delicately display the figure. Must-have options are updated by the addition of modernity through sophisticated details as well as luxurious and ethical materials.

Pride of place goes to warm colors mixed with the return of classics—loose shapes worn next to the skin or skimpier to reveal with subtlety. A mix-and-match approach is applied to updated essentials with a touch of fantasy and strong, edgy silhouettes with a modern, womanly and casual yet chic vibe.

In fabrications, graphic openwork sees mesh knits get a bold update. With a graphic geometric treatment, the stitch is looped with varying spaces, knitted with a dry yarn in gauge 7 or 9.

Minimal art yields a clean, graphic jacquard inspired by Bauhaus, giving the engineered motif a geometric or linear treatment for a modern and minimal vibe.

Hazy stripes are wide-placed patterns with a blurred effect due to a mix of chine yarns and two alternating monochrome yarns. Graphic and minimal subtlety in gauge 3 or 5 create an enveloping, chunky-sweater effect.

Stitch patchwork—textured mix-and-match stitches in a monochromatic look—make for a subtle and minimal graphic effect. From fine gauge to hand knit in color, it delivers modernity and freshness.

Delicate, open, fine-gauge knits add winter wonder. The knit is worked in a fine and wooly count for greater softness and delicacy and is enhanced with alternating openwork and textured graphics.

Textured braiding trends this Winter with 3-D texture important on chunky sweaters, cable knits or interwoven stitches in placed or mixed allover. Dry and colorful merino-wool yarn is knitted in chunky gauge 3 or by hand.

We love the visual effect of knitting in geometric textures. Round, fine yarns are shaped using a selection of specific stitches to give geometric patterns a 3-D look and texture on both the face and back.

Tartan makes a comeback this season, working in pop colors and spaced-out checks for a modernized look. Knit hairy (wool, mohair, alpaca) or drier yarns (merino) play with face-backed knits.

On the product side, there is a trend toward a loose look in a matching layered outfit, with a loose minimal-maximal vibe in an ultra-heavy-gauge version. Long cardigans in oversized silhouettes are worn as a dress or coat.

There is also room for a chic sweat look in go-to cut-and-sew pieces for updated comfortable and feminine designs.

Cutout chunky sweaters appear with the cutout reinforced and featured in a heavy-gauge knit with detachable collars, two-pieces and off-kilter shapes in a rough, controlled and elegant spirit. Channeling 1980s vintage with sleeve play, the balloon-sleeve sweater features voluminous sleeve heads and tube cuffs, accentuates the waist and is adorned with discreet girly yet mature ruffles. The draped turtleneck is a luxurious second-skin piece in wool and silk, playing on skewed and draped shapes with elongated sleeves, scarf-tie collars and rolled, raw edges. ●

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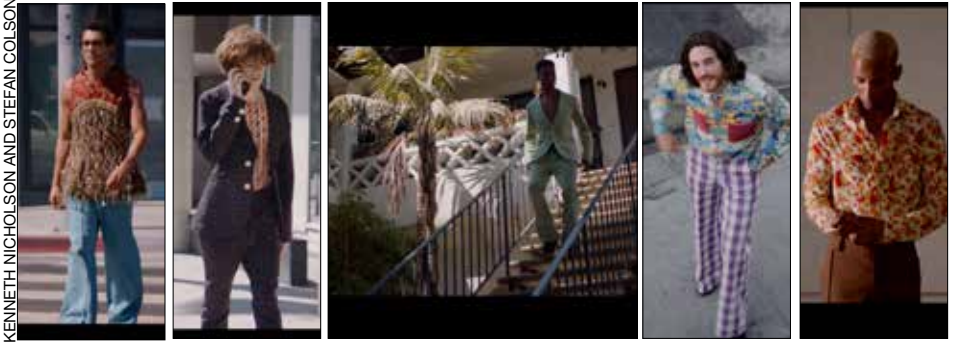
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Jonathan Simkhai



Kenneth Nicholson



Lavie by CK



Tadashi Shoji

## NYFW Supports Designers Through a Next-Gen Showcase

During **New York Fashion Week's** latest run, Sept. 13–17, designers took new approaches to showcasing their fashions. Due to the continued challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, guidelines on gatherings, quarantines and travel meant the typical NYFW could not be held onsite.

Many designers, including Tadashi Shoji, unveiled their latest collections through video presentations with models wearing garments in alluring locations. For Shoji, that meant filming in a tropical-forest setting in which he showcased his formalwear, which featured delicate laces, expertly crafted ruffles and sheer overlays.

Jonathan Simkhai reimagined his Fall 2020 collection as a fashion film featuring models in cozy garments that boasted unique details on updated trench coats; fringe-lined, ankle-length skirts; and a bit of romance. Focusing on taking the season “step by step,” Simkhai noted that coming together as a worldwide society is crucial to the well-being of the global population.

Following the debut of her first swimwear collection at **Paraiso** in August, **Lavie by CK's** Claude Kameni unveiled her ready-to-wear 2020–21 collection, named **Mind Your Business**. The collection was created with a confident consumer in mind, yet Kameni noted that confidence is for

everyone and everybody, which led her to design pieces in comfortable fabrics that complement all shapes.

Kenneth Nicholson released his short film “Grasp,” which tells the story of a character who wakes from a dream and eventually goes about his day to experience the world around him while the entire cast wears the designer’s latest garments. His first filmmaking experience, Nicholson maintained his commitment to family by including in the film his two daughters, Rosaline and Echo, and a cameo by **Houston Ballet** star Harper Watters, from the designer’s hometown, who has also appeared on the runway for the Autumn/Winter 2020–21 collection.—*Dorothy Crouch*

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# Recent Innovations in Fiber Composition and Dyeing Serve Ecological Purposes

By Dorothy Crouch *Managing Editor*

Recently, manufacturers of materials made from and processes used to treat fibers that are used in outdoor, active and athleisure apparel have made advancements that allow consumers to feel more confident that their purchasing decisions will look good and also contribute to a healthier earth and potentially reduce threats to the environment.

A recent announcement from the Latham, N.Y., material-technology-solutions company **PrimaLoft** saw the company's introduction of a new biodegradable, 100 percent recycled, synthetic-insulation-and-performance fabric. According to the company's communications manager, Ken Fisk, the unveiling of PrimaLoft Bio in early September was the culmination of a project that began in 2014.

"We've been proactive in our approach to sustainable innovations," Fisk said. "The company began the development of its biodegradable fibers prior to the growing market demand for more-progressive sustainable solutions. Market-related forces, such as concerns over microplastic, served to accelerate PrimaLoft's development of biodegradable materials."

Through a process in which microbes are able to break down the fibers once they are exposed to ocean water, wastewater or a landfill, no potentially harmful residual material is left behind, yet the product retains its durability to perform to the expectations of consumers. Eventually, fibers become water, carbon dioxide, methane, biomass and humus.

"PrimaLoft has enhanced the fibers used to produce its synthetic insulation without affecting their performance characteristics, to enable them to biodegrade at a highly accelerated rate," Fisk said. "At PrimaLoft, we never saw recycling as the final step, and that is really what spurred the development of PrimaLoft Bio. For PrimaLoft Bio, as with all of our products, our priority is always focused on performance and sustainability. Performance and sustainability should exist in balance with each other. Each one elevated. Neither one sacrificed."

Despite the challenges of high testing costs during the monitoring of biodegradation rates for the materials and the long periods of time devoted to the process, Fisk notes that every version of the fibers tested had to meet PrimaLoft's vi-



Norrøna Gore-Tex Outdoor Coat with PrimaLoft Bio

sion and the demands of clients. At the Norwegian outdoor-apparel brand **Norrøna**, Fredrik Lundberg, director of research for development and design, explained that choosing more-responsible sources for its materials is a priority.

"At Norrøna we are always striving to find ways to utilize the best technology to design and produce more-sustainable products. We use synthetic insulations throughout our product collection, and we are excited to work with partners in the industry who are also pushing toward developing more-sustainable technologies," Lundberg said. "PrimaLoft Bio is the first of its kind, and we hope that this will push other partners and brands to make more-sustainable materials choices in the future."

The brand is particularly interested in working with PrimaLoft to combat detrimental effects that fiber leakage can cause to the world's oceans. Norrøna's director of innovation and sustainability, Brad Boren, recognizes that approaching sustainability requires examining the entire supply chain from sourcing fibers to the post-consumer life of a garment.

"At Norrøna we look to PrimaLoft Bio to help us reduce marine damage due to fiber leakage," Boren said. "All fiber production waste and post-use fiber waste should be recycled, but we depend on technology such as Bio to help prevent leakage from washing from entering the environment."

Serving another area of the apparel-production process, Seoul, South Korea-headquartered **Hyosung** announced the release of its creora Color+ spandex for materials comprising natural blends such as cotton, rayon or modal. Building from the characteristics of the company's creora Power Fit, Mike Simko, Hyosung's global marketing director envisions this new offering as an ideal match for intimate, activewear and ready-to-wear brands that have faced the challenge of creating products that lose their brilliance due to the dyeing limitations of garments that include a high-spandex content.

"A few years ago, we developed creora Color+ for nylon, dyeable fabrics," Simko said. "But then we saw movement into loungewear, where it's not necessarily technical fabrics, but they are fabrics that you want to feel good and look good in. It could be ready-to-wear or loungewear, it could be intimate apparel, but you had the same issue. You have this grin-through where 10, 15 or 20 percent of the fabric is not dyeing."

After working with its scientists on a process to conduct polymer modifications, Hyosung announced on Sept. 14 that its new creora Color+ formula would allow its spandex to accept dyes that could be used with natural fibers. This advancement affords rich colors through technology that will maintain the integrity of deep colors.

"Instead of having a Color+ only for yoga pants, you can now have maybe a cotton-rib camisole or a fitted top made out of rayon jersey," Simko said. "If it's a nice fitted top and you're showing the curves of the woman, the colors are different depending on the curve. Now you can get a more vibrant color."

As more people have worked from home, Simko has recognized a trend that is carrying out onto the street and will continue to expand in everyday life for the next six to 12 months.

"The trend that we are seeing is the work-from-home experience is going to come out of the home," Simko explained. "We want to feel good about the way we dress, how it looks, and we may want to be casual but we want our stuff to look good. Maybe we will not be wearing tailored clothing as much because it's going to be more casual, but we want it to look good on us and fit properly." ●

In an unprecedented time that will have lasting effects on consumer's consumption habits & values, brands must find new ways to engage and interact emotionally with their targets.

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# Zyper Aims to Build Brand Communities Through Technology

By Andrew Asch *Retail Editor*

As digital commerce becomes more crucial to retailers, companies offering an edge in the digital competition for consumer attention and wallets are reporting growth.

The San Francisco-headquartered **Zyper** has reported new high-profile clients such as **General Mills**, **Frito-Lay** and **Dunkin' Donuts**. In October, it also is preparing to release a Zyper software product that is a chat feature where brands can help foster fan involvement in their products, said Amber Atherton, chief executive officer and founder of the technology company.

Atherton has cultivated her reputation for being something of a digital wunderkind. She started coding as a child and founded the e-commerce jewelry company **My Flash Trash**. She also co-created and appeared in the British reality TV show "Made in Chelsea," which has run for 19 seasons and follows the lives of affluent teenagers and young people. In 2016, she sold the e-jeweler to the Hong Kong-based **Nefertiti Group Ltd.** for an estimated 2 million British pounds or \$2.5 million, according to media accounts.

The show made her an influencer, and she received a lot of pitches from companies. She was surprised at how many missed the mark.

"I developed the framework and idea for Zyper after recognizing white space in the marketing category," Atherton said. "After I co-created and starred in 'Made in Chelsea,' I built a following on **Instagram** and experienced the inundating direct messages that brands and retailers blindly send to influencers. I would receive messages from brands I had never heard of before—it took me by surprise that brands just spent money on influencer outreach without understanding who they were reaching out to or their target customer. I began to understand that loyal brand consumers and community have a power that brands can't buy."

Atherton developed software that locates a brand's biggest fans. After the Zyper software finds the superfans through sourcing their mentions of a brand or posting a logo on social media, it invites them to join a brand community hosted on the platform. In these brand communities, the superfans then



Amber Atherton

generate content for brands.

In 2019, Zyper opened offices in San Francisco. It also developed a luxury client base. It has worked with **LVMH**, **Richemont**, **Kering** and **FarFetch** to build communities of loyal brand fans. In the past year, it has hired several new staff members including a vice president of product and engineering, a head of sales and a head of customer experience.

The branded-chat feature will further allow brands to create a customized, immersive community experience with fans that allows them to work on developing consumer insights through polls and surveys.

Fans can start working with the chat feature when they shop. They can download the custom-brand widget on an order confirmation page of a digital shop. This feature allows them to join a fan community on Zyper where they can start communicating with other fans and the brand. Atherton advises brands to develop networks of superfans.

"I strongly believe that superfan communities are today's influencers and the days of spending thousands of dollars for one influencer's Instagram post are over," she said. "Peer-to-peer recommendations will be the next evolution in brand marketing, and consumers will become an extension of a brand's content team. Brand fans will help brands create more-organic content and determine what channels they should focus on, events they should attend, trends they should get behind and flavors, colors and styles they should introduce." ●

## Cabi Finds a Lifeline With Its Front-Row Platform

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit every business that relies on in-person events, but direct-to-consumer retailer **Cabi** found that it was in a good position to react to that reality.

The Carson, Calif.-headquartered retailer sells the Cabi designer collection and had been developing Cabi Front Row, a proprietary platform where the company's stylists can show the brand's contemporary styles on a **Zoom**-like call. The retailer started beta testing Cabi Front Row last September, said Katie Malone, president and chief marketing officer for Cabi. The company was planning to slowly roll it out in 2020.

"It was uncanny that we had this," Malone said. "We accelerated access to Cabi Front Row, and in a matter of weeks we were ready to shift immediately to serving clients through a virtual, personal styling experience."

The virtual sales experiences gave a lifeline to a company founded on producing in-person events. Cabi reported that sales in August were nearly breaking even compared to many businesses that were reporting cratering sales.

The Cabi Front Row platform features a virtual event where a group of women attending the event watch runway video of Cabi styles. If they like a specific style, they can put it in a virtual dressing room and purchase it later.

Since 2002, Cabi has built a business based on its stylists and independent contractors, who are encouraged to produce shopping events and experiences. Malone said that the company's point of difference is its service. The stylists provide a service where they guide customers on choosing the best styles for their looks and body types, Malone said. Currently, the company works with 3,000 stylists in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom.

Malone forecasted that Cabi stylists will return to focusing on in-person events in the future. But she also forecasted that Cabi Front Row would continue to be a part of the stylists' toolbox, Malone said.—A.A.

## Go Beyond the News and Behind the Scenes

The editors and writers of *California Apparel News* are blogging at *ApparelNews.net*

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## Informa *Continued from page 1*

**WWD**MAGIC, **Project Womens**, **MICAM Americas** and **Sourcing at MAGIC**. “As we continue our event into October, we are loading more rich, shoppable editorial content to better highlight our partner brands as well as updating with timely industry insights and resources found in our ‘Learn’ section. The greatest advantage to having a digital platform this season is the ability for our buyers to consume any and all of our content at their leisure—no matter where they are located and between times—from now until Nov. 1.”

Beginning with the Sept. 1 unveiling of **MAGIC**, **Coterie**, **Project** and **MICAM Americas**, the online events afford opportunities for buyers to meet with brands as many areas of the United States slowly emerge from lockdowns and businesses return to selling without the pressures of traveling. Starting Sept. 15, **Sourcing at MAGIC** launched in order to support businesses that are searching for supply-chain solutions for their apparel businesses.

“We have seen our Virtual Showroom technology change the interface of trade shows on a global scale,” said Heath Wells, co-founder and co-chief executive officer of NuOrder. “It’s important for brands to be able to provide an experience that is unique and interactive, and we are proud to be able to deliver our platform to the world’s largest digital trade show.”

## Making MAGIC digital

Catering to the buyer who is looking for on-trend pieces in women’s young contemporary, **MAGIC Digital** was organized into categories including **Immediates**, new brands, made-in-the-USA, inclusive sizing, staycation, self-care, working from home and those that were selected by Helfman herself. Helfman mentioned that notable brands showing via the digital platform include **Line & Dot**, **Toby Heart Ginger**, **Miss Me**, **Moon River**, **Velvet Heart**, **RD International**, **Be Cool**, **Ever B**, **Girl and the Sun**, **Iena**, **Max Studio**, **Things Between** and **WKNDER Los Angeles** in addition to IMFC Incubator program brands **RE ONA** and **London Grant**. The IMFC Incubator supports emerging Black fashion designers. In attendance from the buyer side were representatives from **ASOS**, **Anthropologie**, **Revolve**, **Urban Outfitters** and **Bloomingdale’s**.

As a sales representative for the sustainable brand **Fabina LA**, Yoon Choi was pleased with the turnout on the digital platform. Selling the Nicole Ko–founded, Los Angeles–based, domestically manufactured line, Choi saw interest from buyers who were based in different areas throughout the United States, including along the East Coast, from Southern states such as Georgia, and Northern regions in New Jersey and Brooklyn. She also saw traffic from stores based in Utah, Texas and Arizona who were interested in the brand’s unisex, seasonless pieces, particularly its sets, which are manufactured using bamboo.

“This is a newer brand based on sustainable, recycled at an affordable price point so it’s a new clientele,” Choi said. “This is very different, getting it on the screen and having to get it through the website and message them or do an email. It’s helpful, and I am getting buyer hits and inquiries so it’s definitely more helpful than me just reaching out to a hundred stores. It definitely has an audience.”

While Choi was finding success through the new **MAGIC Digital** offering, as she sold comfortable pieces in hemp and bamboo that range from \$25 to \$60 retail, she mentioned that there were challenges. Success in this type of sales environment requires engagement, which she was quick to note is a necessity for brands.

“It’s different because you have no social contact, so it’s an adjustment,” she said. “It’s a way to reach out to multiple buyers in a small amount of time. It’s also an opportunity for new brands, brands that are producing differently now, like how we are producing sustainable clothing at affordable prices. It’s still keeping you engaged, but you have to be active in using it every day.”

Representing **Saints & Hearts**, a women’s brand based on South San Pedro Street in downtown Los Angeles, sales manager Sunny Park was receiving a lot of interest for the new brand that only exhibited at one on-site **MAGIC** show in the past. Buyers from the East Coast, southern United States, California and Puerto Rico were interested in Fall pieces and holiday items.

“We have some sequins, people have been buying our bell-bottom denim jeans in various colors, Fall outerwear and tops in olive and rust mostly,” Park said. “We’re getting a lot of customers that are reaching out to view the line. We haven’t generated many sales

yet, but we’ve had a lot of inquiries about our products. They contact us directly and ask about the products. We’re waiting to see. It’s still early.”

Creating an environment in which a **MAGIC** buyer is afforded special show treatment is also key for Park. Selling from basic to expanded sizing, with pieces ranging from \$12 to \$35 wholesale, Park mentioned that **MAGIC** attendees are provided a first glimpse into trends that will be released from the brand, affording a feeling of exclusive access.

“We are updating our newest styles, which we haven’t showcased at a showroom or online yet. They are getting to see a firsthand look at what is coming out from us as well as our in-stocks,” Park said. “We are reserving some quantities for **MAGIC** as it is, so we are not touching those units and they are getting first dibs.”

## Project Digital finds space for new vendors and veterans

When the COVID-19 pandemic caused a number of in-person trade shows to be canceled, Jack Watkins, owner/designer of the Los Angeles–headquartered brand **Propaganda Agency**, found himself scrambling. “How are we going to get our styles to our people?” he asked. He decided to try his first virtual trade show. **Project Digital** also happened to be his first outing with **Project**. He made good reports on the show so far, which is devoted to men’s, dual gender, apparel, accessories and selected footwear.

“We’ve been getting interest from a lot of people we never knew existed,” Watkins said. Retail price points for his men’s knitwear brand, which he described as modern retro, ranges from \$250 to \$600. Another benefit of the show is that it forced his brand to innovate, Watkins said.

“If anything good has come out of COVID-19, it forced us to reckon with how things are done in a digital world,” he said. **Propaganda Agency** specifically ramped up working on wholesale platforms such as NuOrder.

Brands exhibiting at **Project** include **G-Star**, **Hudson**, **Joe’s Jeans**, **Mavi** and **Robert Graham**.

A **Project** veteran making a debut at the virtual show was **The Rad Black Kids**, which is headquartered in Long Beach, Calif., but is manufactured in Portugal.

Thulani Ngazimbi, founder of **The Rad**

**Black Kids**, spoke on a **Project** panel on sustainability and fashion in August 2019 in Las Vegas. He also exhibited at **Project Tokyo** in Japan last year. He wanted to exhibit at **Project Digital** because the **Project** organization has always supported him. Show staff looked for opportunities to shine a spotlight on his brand, such as speaking on a panel.

“They really looked out for Black-owned businesses before looking out for a Black-owned business was cool,” Ngazimbi said. At **Project Digital**, **The Rad Black Kids** introduced tux-style jackets along with other androgynous streetwear looks. Retail price points range from \$18 for socks to \$220 for a tuxedo blazer.

Lizette Chin, president of **Project** and **MAGIC Mens**, said the virtual show would mark the show’s debut for IMFC Incubator designers and brands such as **Hamid Holoman** and **Leimart Park Threads**. **Project Digital** also would present editorial content such as **WGSN**’s trend roundup “Tech Survivalist: Spring/Summer 2021.”

## Coterie vendors and retailers try new pace

The San Francisco–headquartered casual-apparel brand **Marine Layer** produced its first virtual-trade-show booths both at **Coterie Digital**, a show devoted to elevated women’s styles, and at **Project Digital**. It showed its Fall/Holiday 2020 line and its Spring 2021 line.

Andrew Graham, the brand’s director of wholesale and custom, said that the show enjoyed a solid start. “The first couple days were relatively busy,” he said. “My biggest complaint is that we can’t engage the buyers when they are first looking at the brand. They need to request access, and only at that point can I reach out to introduce and tell the brand’s story. Once they do connect, it’s been really great.” Retail prices for **Marine Layer** are \$39 to \$225.

Lisa Kline relaunched her e-commerce site, **ShopLisaKline.com**, in June. She also talked about having to adapt to a different pace when working virtual trade shows.

“When you do [an in-person] trade show, you are immersed in the show, your whole day is about the show,” she said, while noting that virtual trade shows often don’t maintain the same focus.

There are a lot of distractions when work-

➔ Informa page 14



Fabina LA



Thulani Ngazimbi



Fabina LA



Saints & Hearts



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## TRADE EVENTS

### Informa *Continued from page 12*

ing from a remote location. However, buying continues to be overwhelmingly influenced by the pandemic. “I’m looking for things to be comfortable at home—oversize sweaters and pullovers with hoods. I’m looking at activewear. People are really focused on working out at home.” Even her high-end consumers are being careful with money, which has caused her to be more careful with her ordering. “I’m not ordering anything out. I’m just doing immediate things. I’m trying to test the temperature of things and see what’s going on,” she said.

Colleen Sherin, president of Coterie, said that retailers across the board visited the show including **Revolve**, **Nordstrom** and **Rent The Runway**. The digital show offered special features such as brand interviews and a trend showroom by WGSN called “Simply Human: Contemporary Womenswear Trends for S/S21.” She forecasted that the show would offer new editorial features in October.

Brands exhibiting at Coterie Digital include **House of Waris Botanicals**, **Illesteve**, **LaQuan Smith**, **The Kooles**, **Kleed Kimonos**, **Joie** and **Ramy Brook**.

### MICAM Americas Digital finessing virtual-show routine

The **Bed Stü** brand is making its virtual trade-show debut with **MICAM Americas Digital**, which served as a footwear market for women and men.

Jason Wiese, the vice president of sales for Lake Dallas, Texas, organic-leather footwear-and-accessories brand, said that he and his team already have a routine working with virtual-trade-show booths at MICAM.

“Retail customers click on the brand in NuOrder. If we are interested in the retailer, we will do more vetting to see if we can open them as an account,” he said. “If the Bed Stü team wants to find out more about the customer, and the customer has already previewed the Bed Stü virtual showroom, we can provide the customer line sheets, a **YouTube** video presentation, as well as 360-degree photography of the brand’s goods through NuOrder and later follow up with a live-chat video presentation.”

The 360-degree photography aims to provide multi-sided views of an item, lending an experience similar to an in-person trade show. At the virtual trade show, the brand has mostly seen independent shops as well as new retail ventures. Since boutiques and independent shops are buying closer to season, Bed Stü has mostly been showing Fall 2020 pieces and some Spring 2021 styles. Retail prices points for the brand range from \$195 to \$335 for women’s Fall 2020 and \$125 to \$245 for women’s Spring 2021 styles.

Noting that there is strength in camaraderie, Helfman said that the virtual event would fill a void to show that the different industry categories are stronger together.

“Our event this season has really fused the footwear and apparel communities together, filling a much-needed gap by convening the global fashion and footwear communities,” she said.

Brands exhibiting include **Aetrex**, **Blowfish Malibu**, **Camper**, **Cougar**, **Carrano**, **Frye**, **Lines of Denmark**, **Mephisto**, **Strole** and **Voile Blanche**. Retailers registered at the show include **Amazon**, **Zappo’s** and **Journeys**.

### Expanding sourcing solutions digitally

Following its Sept. 15 launch, Sourcing at MAGIC will run through Dec. 15, affording access to manufacturers, suppliers and ser-

vice providers. With 630 exhibitors hailing from 25 countries, Helfman revealed that attendees would have access to 25,000 products from potential supply-chain partners.

“We have a strong representation from China, Vietnam, Colombia, Peru and Canada with a regional focus on South American manufacturers and suppliers and strong representation from Brazil in footwear,” Helfman said. “Also, at launch today, we have a total registration of 2,700 qualified buyers, which include notable buyers from **Bealls Stores**, **Fruit of the Loom**, **Pacific Sportswear**, **Vans** and **Zulily**.”

In addition to connecting suppliers to brands and designers, Sourcing at MAGIC features additional tools to help the industry navigate through the next few months and into 2021. **Fashion for Profit’s** Frances Harder will present the “State of the Industry,” “Checkpoints to Starting a New Brand,” and a question-and-answer session with Simona Racek and Ray Bowman from the **Small Business Development Center** regarding funding for small businesses.

Informa will announce additional offerings throughout the event’s three-month run.

Following its launch in 2019, business-to-business platform **Serai** was in attendance for its second Sourcing at MAGIC, yet this is the company’s first time as an exhibitor. With its innovative approach to identifying the specific needs of brands and retailers to match with the offerings of manufacturers, Serai’s growth manager Finn Hefferon sees extraordinary opportunities in the business of apparel and was looking forward to engaging with potential clients during this edition of Sourcing at MAGIC.

“Our brands and retailers today are looking to connect with very specific manufacturers in specific markets. They need a portal to access a database of suppliers online, and to exchange information with their partners,” Hefferon said. “Manufacturers today are looking to use Serai to amplify their digital presence, and showcase their most unique capabilities to our network of buyers. All of our users are also looking for enhanced analytics and information, as well as access to trade and manufacturing solutions.”

While the event opened on Sept. 15, suppliers were already fielding interest from potential partners. For Wei Lin, general manager at **Solution Knitwear**, attendees were connecting to learn more about the company’s specialty fashion knitwear. Solution Knitwear has offices in New York with a factory in China where sweaters, cardigans, knit dresses and knit skirts are manufactured. This was the company’s first Sourcing at MAGIC appearance, which was drawing attention from attendees in California, Texas and Arizona.

“It’s going pretty well. We got some new connections with buyers. Today is the first day, so I think there will be more connections made in the coming weeks,” Lin said.

While most interest was focused on general knitwear, Lin said that many potential partners were interested in seamless pieces. Noting that his company was working with new whole-garment machinery from Japan, Lin was excited to discuss this offering in addition to the trend toward responsible manufacturing.

“For now, because of COVID-19 and what is going on in the world, people are focusing more on sustainable manufacturing and eco-friendly materials. There is a big trend going on right now, and at our factory we provide sustainable yarn for our customers,” Lin said. “That is one of the biggest trends. That is what the customer wants. They want it to be environmentally friendly. They are more cautious about what they are getting.” ●



Saints & Hearts

## Go Beyond the News and Behind the Scenes

The editors and writers of *California Apparel News* are blogging at *ApparelNews.net*

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Apparel News Group



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PUBLISHED BY  
TLM PUBLISHING INC.  
APPAREL NEWS GROUP  
Publishers of:  
California Apparel News  
Waterwear  
Decorated

EXECUTIVE OFFICE  
The New Mart  
127 E. Ninth St., Suite 806  
Los Angeles, CA 90015  
(213) 627-3737  
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