

Since the dawn of retail, the ultimate goal of giving the customer what she wants has not changed, but the path toward it has. So, too, has the concern for the stakeholders on that journey. There's the customer, of course, but also the people who design and create the products, the factory workers who produce the products, and all of the other workers who pack and drive and deliver and sell. There are, too, the people who live in the communities where all of these functions take place, whose health and livelihoods may be directly or indirectly connected to these businesses.

This year's crop of Innovators, like those before it, are harnessing the power of technology to improve their businesses and serve the consumer, yet each year, the players seem to be more capable of, and thus more interested in, taking a more holistic view of their supply chains. With increasing visibility into everything enabled by automated and connected systems as well as business intelligence, the possibilities for collaborating with partners, identifying consumer desires and speeding the whole lifecycle increase.

From sustainability and artificial intelligence to automating workflows, doubling down on fit technology and perfecting patterns, this year's innovative cohort shows that there's no wrong way to move your business forward and rise above the competition — even as the stakes get higher every day.

By Jordan K. Speer & Jessica Binns.



2017 **TOP** **apparel** INNOVATOR



The Black Tux

Gardena, Calif. | www.theblacktux.com

SELF-NOMINATED

Think back to the last time you rented a tuxedo. Was it senior prom? Your wedding? A corporate event? Is the mere thought of that experience generating a spark of anxiety, what with the multiple trips to the tux shop to get fitted, another to pick it up and another to return it? And what about the style and fit? Did you feel like a sharp-dressed man, or more like you'd raided your father's closet? You don't have to answer that.

But you're nodding your head. You know what I'm talking about. In 2013, after a terrible experience renting tuxedos for Andrew Blackmon's wedding, longtime friends Blackmon and Patrick Coyne saw an opportunity to spruce up the traditional tuxedo and suit rental business. They ran their idea through startup incubator MuckerLab of Mucker Capital and out popped The Black Tux, an online tux rental shop that removes the drudgery from the rental process and also outfits its customers in stylish high-end tuxedos and suits — the equivalent of a \$1,200+ garment in a retail store. Black Tux uses 100 percent Italian merino wool in its suiting, 100 percent cotton for its shirting, and real leather for its shoes.

The ordering process couldn't be simpler. Go online, enter some basic information about your height, weight and build, and a sophisticated algorithm will tell you what size you should be. (Black Tux snagged its data scientist from

Netflix.) Place your order, and your garment arrives 14 days prior to your event so you have time for a free exchange if necessary. After your event, place it back in the bag and box it arrived in, and ship it back, free of charge.

For those who prefer more traditional measuring methods, the company will send you a tape measure, or you can go to your tailor, and submit those measurements. Or, you can request its brand new home try-on option, which will allow you to see how a suit looks and feels before you rent (but only Tuesday through Thursday, and only six weeks in advance of your event, to reduce the likelihood you're using this option to avoid paying).

Today, its online store represents the majority of its business, but that may change soon, says Mike Klepfer, vice president, operations, as Black Tux just inked a partnership with Nordstrom to allow customers to access Black Tux directly from its stores. The first of these opened in March at Nordstrom's Mission Viejo, Calif., store. Business is growing rapidly, spreading through word of mouth, through cross-marketing with retail partners — which also includes the wedding registries of Crate-and-Barrel and The Knot — and through media spots, including a recent *GQ* feature. Black-Tux also has four of its own showrooms in Chicago, Dallas, LA and New York City and a fifth in San Francisco



opening this month.

Business has grown so quickly that the company has moved from producing garments twice a year to buying monthly. It services all of its customers from one distribution center just outside Los Angeles, but it is running out of space, and looking to expand, potentially to another DC on the East Coast. Last year, it invested a couple million in technology, much of it from SDI Industries, to upgrade its current 65,000-square-foot DC. It is now fully automated, with each garment individually tracked via RFID throughout inbound and outbound processes.

As its name might suggest, the majority of its inventory is black, but the company makes sure to keep fashion-forward choices on hand for those customers who are a little farther out on the edge. Its black and white and red split tartan tuxedo, which makes the edge look like the middle (see for yourself), has been very popular, while its Midnight Blue tuxedo has been its best-selling non-black suit this season. Every suit is available in classic and slim fit and has multiple options for pants' length.

Next up, the company is considering a retail model for those customers who want to keep their garments. In short, says Klepfer, "we want to offer people what they want."

— Jordan K. Speer

FOSSIL Group

Richardson, Texas | www.fossil.com

NOMINATED BY: Dassault Systemes | www.3ds.com

Over the past 33 years, FOSSIL has grown immensely. It began by importing brands before starting to develop its own brands and products. It also purchased a couple of Swiss watch brands. In the late '90s, the company began licensing watch and jewelry lines, starting with Armani and expanding significantly from there to include brands such as Michael Kors, Burberry, Tory Burch and DKNY.

"Over time, the company grew as an amalgamation of all of these brands," says Steve Street, senior vice president, global operations and supply chain, with the majority (around 80 percent) of FOSSIL's business in watches. That's split about evenly between owned and licensed brands, he says.

"Essentially, for decades, each subgroup of each brand had its own way of tracking and keeping up with the product development process," says Street.

It's a familiar tale: Emails and spreadsheets ruled the day, so the company ended up with many ways of handling product development, both by brand and by category (leathers, shoes, jewelry, watches, etc.). "We had a million ways of doing the same thing," quips Brad Bollinger, vice president of product development, licensed brands.

In short, FOSSIL was losing a lot of time, energy and money to redundancy and inefficiency, and it needed to integrate and unify its product development processes.

It thought the answer to its problems could be found in a product lifecycle management

solution, so the company issued an RFP in 2011, narrowed the search to two contenders, and eventually chose Dassault. One of the primary reasons for that decision, says Bollinger, was that Dassault agreed to integrate Adobe Illustrator into its platform, enabling FOSSIL's design group to drag and drop directly into the PLM system without having to re-enter data.

"Designers don't want to do data entry, and we didn't want a layer of re-interpretation," said Bollinger. "So Dassault created the link between Adobe and its PLM system, and it's amazing," he says. By having Illustrator integrated from the beginning, all projects are maintained in the system

from start to finish, eliminating any "rogue development." The company has about 900 licensed users on the system, including internal designers and vendor partners.

FOSSIL started the project in February 2013, with two planned go-lives, and finished in July 2016, with the Adobe portion one of the last things to go live. "It was a lot of work on Dassault's end," he says.

It's been less than a year, but the benefits are unmistakable. One of the most significant is that FOSSIL now has a clear understanding of its design-to-hit ratio, and because it can measure it, is able to improve it. For example, for one watch brand, it has improved

from an eight- or nine-to-one design-to-hit rate to a five-to-one design-to-hit rate. Said differently, it has reduced by about 45 percent the number of designs it creates, while increasing the percentage of designs it adopts.

"That is a very big impact," says Bollinger. "We have less sampling. On one of our larger brands, for example, that kind of reduction in sampling would translate to about 300 fewer designs per brand, and we typically do about three samples per design, so that's getting close to 1,000 fewer samples per brand per year."

FOSSIL has also reduced cycle time, in large part due to that reduction in hit ratio, but also because of greater transparency and collaboration. "In short," says Bollinger, "we have one tool, one process and one truth."

— Jordan K. Speer



American Eagle Outfitters

Pittsburgh, Pa. | www.ae.com

NOMINATED BY: Reflexis | www.reflexisinc.com

When it comes to product launches, marketing and other store-level events, retailers invest a lot of money to research, brand, package and market. Yet many of these big projects lose steam when it comes to executing at the store level. The tasks that are necessary to execute are often ineffectively communicated with tools such as emails, conference calls and handwritten notes.

American Eagle Outfitters has found a solution. For the retailer — which operates 1,026 stores in the United States, Canada and Mexico, and is in 176 international locations via license partners — the goal is for “every customer to leave happier than when they came in,” says Ellen Horn, lead, store communications. That requires giving store managers the ability to put the customer first.

To do that, American Eagle Outfitters (AEO) needed to provide information to its store managers (SMs) in one place and one version so they did not spend valuable consumer-facing time searching through forwarded and unprioritized emails. To get a handle on store communications, AEO implemented the Task Manager™ solution from Reflexis.

What’s more, AEO dug deep into the solution to take advantage of some of its more useful features, including its store-specific calendar, which allowed the company to communicate in a holistic way without burdening individual stores with specific tasks or communications that were not relevant to that specific location.

How does AEO use the tool? From the home office, it loads information into the systems such as floor sets, pay days, holidays and specific market events such as tax-free weekends, and then pushes that information out to the appropriate stores on a time-relevant schedule.



“What’s great about it is the teams get a holistic view of communications,” says Horn, because it includes both the business drivers and the specific tasks or projects that need to be completed during the week or month. At AEO, the company has moved to a three-month calendar. “For the first time ever, store managers can see what is going to happen in their business and schedule to it,” says Horn.

Additionally store and district managers can add store-specific items, such as associate availability, PTO requests or market mall-specific events to inform the home office, says Horn.

To simplify things further, AEO developed a daily planner screen to provide a “one-shot” snapshot of the business, a “huge win” for SMs, she says, who can now log in to this unified dashboard, see

what they need to do, and then get back on the sales floor without digging around for a lot of information. Previously, SMs spent approximately two hours every day sifting through communications — and that didn’t even include execution; that was just figuring out what needed to be done, quips Horn. Since using Task Manager, that process has been reduced to about 15 to 20 minutes.

Other benefits of the solution: AEO has seen an approximate 70 percent increase in completed projects year over year because it can track what’s been completed vs. what hasn’t, and communications have been reduced by 30 percent.

Next up, AEO is looking into the solution’s mobility feature. It has iPads in all of its stores and wants to bring the app onto the devices so that store managers can operate on the go, without having to leave the sales floor, enabling them to better service customers.

— Jordan K. Speer

Canada Goose

Toronto, Ontario, Canada | www.canadagoose.com

NOMINATED BY: NGC

At a time when both the retail and luxury worlds have seen better days, Canada Goose is among the few bright spots in the industry (insert bird-related phoenix-rising metaphor here).

Steeped in Arctic heritage and known for outfitting film crews working in extreme conditions and locations, Toronto-based Canada Goose boasts an enthusiastic celebrity following. A-listers from David Beckham to Scarlett Johansson have embraced Canada Goose's down-filled, fur-trimmed parkas, elevating the brand profile and sealing its status as one of winter's most coveted products. Yet outside of Canada, where brand awareness is 76 percent, many consumers still don't know about the makers of luxury down jackets; just 16 percent of survey respondents in the United States are aware of the brand. There's plenty of room for growth, and markets such as Germany, Italy and Scandinavia are prime targets for

expansion in Europe, which includes e-commerce sites for France and the United Kingdom (in addition to web stores for the United States and Canada) — all of which pulled in total e-commerce sales of \$33 million for fiscal 2016 amid \$290.8 million in revenue overall.

Canada Goose, which filed for an IPO on Feb. 15, 2017, prides itself on being a vertically integrated company. One third of its products are produced in company-owned manufacturing facilities, and there are plans to bring even more production capacity back in house from third-party partners in order to increase profits.

To manage growth and set the stage for the future, Canada Goose turned to NGC's Extended PLM platform, which combines fashion PLM with supply chain management tools. From costing and vendor/supplier management to product testing, production tracking and quality control, the end-to-end solution helps



the outerwear brand keep product development lean and efficient.

And with its sights set on broadening its product assortment, Canada Goose has a vested interest in running a tight ship. Based on customer feedback, according to its IPO filing, the brand is looking to move into categories such as footwear, fleece, bedding, travel accessories and knitwear to become a daily part of its customers' lives.

— Jessica Binns

The Buckle

Kearney, Neb. | www.buckle.com

NOMINATED BY: SheerID | www.sheerID.com

Buckle is a proud champion of the military, and shows its support in many ways, including by sending care packages to soldiers overseas. Additionally, a percentage of the proceeds from select merchandise goes to military members and military non-profits. Since 2016, combined donations have totaled more than \$95,500.

In its stores, the denim and casual apparel retailer shows its appreciation by offering a discount to members of the military. To ensure customer eligibility, the sales associate checks the military ID at the register and issues the discount.

As an increasing number of Buckle customers began to shop online, the retailer wanted to enable military customers to benefit from the discount both in-stores and online. In order to offer the military discount online, the



company needed a secure and efficient method of handling ID verification.

That's where SheerID comes in. The eligibility verification software provider allowed Buckle to offer discounts

without interrupting the customer experience. After initially verifying a customer's military credentials online, a 10 percent discount is applied to the online purchase and all purchases thereafter, each time the customer (or his or her dependents, who also qualify for the discount) shops online. Cassie McDonald, project manager for the program, said that 41 percent of verified guests who use the military discount are active duty, while 45 percent are veterans, and the remainder are dependents.

According to Diane Applegate, vice president of supply chain and merchandise operations, Buckle has

found that offering the discount online has enabled military customers to easily reap its benefits, making verification across all channels possible.

Since implementation, the company has received a lot of positive feedback from customers about the offering. "SheerID takes care of troubleshooting any problems that a guest might encounter throughout the verification process. With SheerID, we've been able to verify more than 37,000 military personnel. In short, it's a win-win for everyone involved," Applegate said.

— Jordan K. Speer

CareZips

Atlanta, Ga. | www.carezips.com

SELF-NOMINATED

For former University of Georgia fashion merchandising student Molly Dye, necessity really was the mother of invention. Faced with watching her Alzheimer's-stricken mother endure the indignity of having a caregiver change her briefs in a skilled nursing facility in 2006, Dye decided there had to be a better way. For her mother, for the caregiver and for herself.

She paints a vivid picture of the scene: the tall, svelte English-as-a-second-language caregiver straining her back leaning over to wrangle Dye's "large" mother, who — half falling out of the bed — didn't understand the staffer's stilted commands. Chaos with a side of humiliation.

A light bulb went off in Dye's head. "If I can open the pants frontally and eliminate the front seam, then you can access the patient's abdomen frontally," she says, describing how she rushed home to dust off her decades-old sewing machine to experiment with patterns. And thus CareZips was born.

CareZips pants, carried in four colors and seven unisex sizes, are wonderfully simple and employ three zippers — one each on the outside of each leg and a third that runs from one interior knee to the other — that ease the burden of get-

ting patients in and out of garments. Though Dye developed the pants with hospice and caregiving facility patients in mind, the use case has expanded to include dialysis patients, wound care and wheelchair-enabled individuals. Given that roughly 10,000 people in the United States have turned 65 years old every day since Jan. 1 this year, products such as CareZips are poised to become an important part of the lives of aging, and disabled, Americans, notes Dye.

Healthcare textiles company Encompass Group produces CareZips pants through a NAFTA-approved factory in Mexico and ships the product from its facility in McDonough, Ga., an hour south of Atlanta. Initially Encompass made two fabric recommendations: the winning one — 82 percent polyester, 21 percent rayon and 7 percent spandex — beat out a 65 percent polyester/35 percent cotton blend that wrinkles a lot and is harsh on the skin, explains Dye. Indeed, a nurse at a North Carolina veterans facility found that the fabric was so soft that it was lessening skin tears, according to Dye.

Currently, major retailers such as Amazon, Walgreens and Walmart carry CareZips online, but the start-up also sells to veterans' centers in Michigan, Missouri and North Caro-



lina. Dye says the next move would be securing contracts with major medical equipment companies such as McKesson as well as corporate adult care communities that would buy the product outright and then charge the patients' families. In that scenario, nurses wield enormous influence when they see how CareZips elevates patient care. Once you win over the nurse, says Dye, the nurse will go a long way toward convincing upper management.

Since its launch nearly three years ago, the patented CareZips design has stayed about 90 percent the same, says Dye, though one important iteration moved the side zippers forward so that patients weren't rolling onto the zipper heads (ouch!).

— Jessica Binns

Crunch Fitness

New York, N.Y. | www.crunch.com

NOMINATED BY: Cegid | www.cegid.com



Cycling while belting out karaoke. Feeling the burn while bouncing around in spring-based low-impact boots. From pole dancing like a pro to flying through the air with the greatest of ease, workouts at Crunch Fitness range from the average to the ambitious to the exotically imaginative. The New York City-based chain of fitness clubs includes more than 145 Crunch Fitness locations nationwide plus 32 premium Crunch Signature facilities featuring yoga and spin studios, live DJs, child care and more.

To enhance the all-around fitness experience, Crunch sells apparel including men's shorts and women's sports bras — among its bestsellers — as well as high-growth products such as women's capris and crop tops, a direct result of the athleisure trend, says vice president of member services Mike

Neff. "Crunch apparel had always been primarily branded pieces but we've seen a need for performance gear and athleisure, so we've brought in brands like Under Armour and Onzie," he adds.

The company's business model deviates from the usual retail norm. "Our primary business is running health clubs so our managers are not true retailers," Neff explains. "Our true retailers live in our corporate headquarters and have the knowledge to run this area of our business."

Recently, Crunch needed to upgrade its retail platform for three primary reasons: payment security, cloud convenience and customer data. With the Jan. 15, 2017 SHA-2 security compliance deadline looming, Crunch had to act quickly or suffer the consequences. "Our prior applications were not going to update their platform to meet these

standards, which then put our credit card processing at risk," Neff points out. "PCI compliance has gotten really strict these days and as a level 2 merchant, we need to prove our platforms are secure every quarter."

The next obstacle? Struggling to maintain hosted applications. Self-hosting always sounds great in the beginning, says Neff, but ends up costing you more in the end. "The days of hosting your own applications and taking up real estate in large data centers with expensive servers are over for most small and mid-size companies," he explains, adding that cloud technology's dramatically decreasing cost makes it a "no brainer."

And last but not least, Crunch was missing out on valuable insights into customers' buying habits. "We were only capturing half of the sales journey of our members," Neff says. "We could tell how much a member purchased for a membership or personal training, but not necessarily that they bought water and a nutrition bar every day they worked out."

To address all of these issues, Crunch deployed Cegid's Yourcegid Retail Y2 platform, particularly enticed by the system's purchase order creation and management process. "It was important to have a system tell us when and what we should be ordering and how often," says Neff, adding that previously Crunch relied on its stores to tell headquarters which merchandise was needed. Yourcegid Retail Y2 has enabled the fitness chain to tighten margins and manage store inventory through a central cloud-based system instead of relying on manual POs submitted by stores.

And because the platform captures the entire journey of the

Crunch customer, the company now has the data it needs to develop compelling loyalty programs to increase customer spend.

But the move to the cloud has been perhaps the most transformative aspect of the deployment. In-

stead of relying on two disparate retail systems, now Crunch has just one. One of its old systems ran locally on a single computer at individual club locations and on a “few occasions” the entire database was lost when the computer got corrupt-

ed. Says Neff, “Moving to cloud allowed us to save thousands per year in data center costs related to hosting our own application as well as the peace of mind in knowing all is being backed up.”

— Jessica Binns

NYDJ

Vernon, Calif. | www.nydj.com

NOMINATED BY: LaForce | www.laforce.nyc

When you’re already solving one of a woman’s biggest pain points when getting dressed — looking one size smaller — what’s left for denim brand NYDJ to do?

According to president and CEO Lisa Collier, the answer lies in creating products that deliver even more benefits and borrowing from athleisure to make that happen. “Athleisure is nothing more than comfort and ease of use,” she explains, adding that athletic and outdoor activities are influencing the technologies that are finding their way into a new generation of denim.

NYDJ — the no. 1 selling women’s denim brand in department stores, offering more than 66 sizes from petite and plus to missy, tall and maternity — is always on the hunt for new fabric technologies and innovations that can solve problems for its customers. Through a partnership with Prosperity Mills, the brand discovered the Fiber J fabric that powers its new Future Fit technology — and received exclusivity on the material.

“At denim shows, everyone talks about THERMOLITE and COOLMAX because everyone has their own version of it,” Collier explains. “Fiber J is not broadly available in the market. There aren’t a lot of linear compression technical fibers out there.”

For now, “no one but the sports industry” offers linear compression that creates a sleek shape while remaining comfortable, so NYDJ is wading into new territory. “We’ve also expanded into adding uplift technology, which makes the consumer look like they’ve been to the gym and they haven’t,” Collier adds.

Working with a new fabric involves more than a few tweaks and nuances in the manufacturing process. “There are more variables to deal with, from washing and determining shrinkage to perfecting patterns up front and achieving the precise sewing and needle tension,” explains Collier. “It requires a lot more preproduction.”

Though NYDJ primarily is a wholesale brand, it operates an e-commerce website and two stores in Scott-



sdale, Ariz., and Garden City, N.Y. In an effort to further engage with customers directly, the brand recently began hosting shoppable Facebook Live segments to talk up its products and innovations and even featured Emme — routinely credited as the original plus model — to promote awareness of its sizing inclusivity. While the customer wants to know why a certain pair of jeans could work for her, she doesn’t necessarily want to hear about the nitty-gritty technical details, Collier adds.

NYDJ sees a major opportunity to grow internationally as well as in specialty boutiques. As a premium brand with price points in excess of \$100, it would benefit from the service levels that an intimate boutique would offer. And because NYDJ uses vanity sizing, a shopper may not know to size down and thus might walk away with a negative experience — something that high-touch service could alleviate.

— Jessica Binns

Xero Shoes

Broomfield, Colo. | www.xeroshoes.com

SELF-NOMINATED

How many of us long to run barefoot and carefree, the wind at our backs and possibility stretching out before us? How many of us want to avoid the pain and health complications of landing on a rusty nail or shard of glass? For those folks who checked both of those boxes, Xero Shoes hits that sweet spot in the middle with shoes that allow your feet to bend, flex, move and feel the world with enough protection to make them safe and comfortable.

Xero Shoes is a lightweight, natural movement footwear brand that offers sandals as well as performance and casual closed-toe shoes. To understand just how lightweight these shoes are, says founder and CEO Steven Sashen, consider that “three pairs of our Z-Trail sport sandals weigh less than one pair from a big competitor.

“Xero shoes are built to let your feet move naturally,” he says, with features including wide toe boxes to let your toes spread and relax, non-elevated heels for proper posture and low-to-the-ground “stack height” for balance and agility.

The company grew out of Sash-

en’s own experiences getting injured while sprinting. That led him to barefoot running, which led him to want to produce a shoe that reproduced the barefoot experience as closely as possible, because, after all, there are some surfaces that are not amenable to bare feet.

Xero shoes are lightweight, so they do not interfere with your gait; they are flexible enough to let your feet bend and move and grip the ground and they are durable, says Sashen. Their patented FeelTrue® soles are designed to provide the perfect mix of protection and “ground feedback” that your brain needs for proper and efficient movement, he says.

Launched in 2010, the company has “proven [its] concept directly” — initially selling only a do-it-yourself sandal-making kit, and then launching ready-to-wear in 2013 — selling almost 150,000 pairs to customers in 94 countries who previously had only seen the shoes online or on someone else’s feet.

To describe its typical customer, Sashen says, “Think Whole Foods. ... It’s Millennials-plus, 65 percent men,

slightly higher educated, slightly higher income, somewhat iconoclastic.”

Among Xero Shoes’ new launches this year are an ultra-lightweight travel sandal, Genesis, and a women’s casual canvas shoe, Lena. It’s also launching a men’s and women’s performance multi-use shoe called Prio and the DayLite hiking boot (which weighs just 10.2 ounces), both of which feature functional instep tensioners (meaning the webbing isn’t sewn to the upper), which locks your midfoot in place so that your toes can function freely. Other new offerings: the Boaty McBoat shoe and the Coalton, a minimalist take on the familiar Chukka.

As innovative as the company is in product development, it’s also forging a new path in marketing by using what Sashen calls the “Wild West world” of equity crowdfunding.

The \$28.5-million company is growing quickly, and needs to keep up with demand. “We outsold inventory for the past two years,” says Sashen. “It used to be that retailers would pre-book big orders, now they are expecting us to carry the inventory.”

But Xero’s approach is unique, in that it is an already established company using crowdfunding not only to generate capital but to raise an army of influencers.

“We’re in that awkward ‘teen-age’ phase where we have a very robust and sophisticated team, plan and model but at the same time we’re on the cusp of having proven the concept at retail and online. Rather than argue about financing, let’s go to the people who keep coming back,” he says. “This is a whole new approach. We want our customers to be owners and share in the future of Xero Shoes. We’re making the customer part of the story,” he concludes.

— Jordan K. Speer





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EVISU

Osaka, Japan | www.evisu.com

NOMINATED BY: Albert | www.albert.ai

While many retailers are still just considering the possibilities and potential of artificial intelligence, forward-thinking brands such as Japan's luxury denim-centric label EVISU are actively taking advantage.

When EVISU was founded in 1991, it made waves in the international denim scene with its Japanese selvedge denims adorned with hand-painted seagull logos on the back pockets. Today, EVISU has evolved into a lifestyle brand offering a wide range of products from men's and women's jeans, t-shirts, sweats and knits to underwear, eyewear and more.

Six years ago EVISU launched the brand globally, initially targeting the United States. However, the company pulled back its efforts to focus on Asia but decided to give the U.S. another shot six months ago. The United States is too big of a market to bypass so EVISU had to figure out how to break in.

Running digital marketing campaigns across channels is no easy feat for an e-commerce brand seeking a very specific and defined customer. EVISU was looking to not only get attention from customers who hadn't heard of the brand, but it also needed shoppers to spend an average of \$400 on jeans.

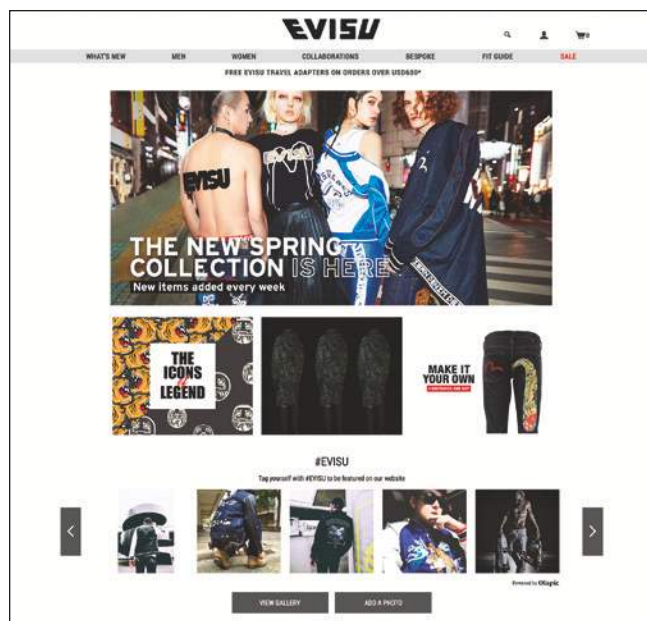
At the time, EVISU also had a very small online team, and managing all its digital marketing needs — specifically search engine marketing and social channels — was an overwhelming task.

Before switching to an AI platform, EVISU relied on global marketing campaigns, with a distinct lack of specific geo-targeting. The brand had very little success on social media, spending more on ad campaigns than it was converting in sales.

The brand also failed to gain any traction in terms of sales from Facebook in North America, which now accounts for a double-digit percentage of total North American online sales.

To improve its digital marketing program, EVISU turned to Albert from marketing automation provider Adgorithms, an artificial intelligence marketing platform that removes many of the complexities of modern marketing. Albert tests a seemingly infinite combination of ad graphics and text throughout the channels of your choosing, discarding the ones that fail to resonate with online users and improving his learnings along the way.

For EVISU, setting up Albert was as easy as setting a budget and granting Albert administrative access to its marketing channels, such as Google AdWords and Facebook. From there, Albert took about a month to get up and running



while it learned about EVISU's channels and competitors.

Before Albert, EVISU only had one person focusing on Google AdWords and doing on-site merchandising — and was “always in the weeds.” Now the company can take a step back and be more surgical in its approach rather than following a one-size-fits-all model to decision-making and strategy, considering that Albert handles AdWords now.

Albert's approach to audience identification is different from a traditional marketer's. For Albert, it's less about identifying entirely new buyer personas, in the traditional sense, and more about isolating the individual customer behaviors, traits and patterns that lead to increased conversions. He then starts acting on those by creating micro-segments that generate very targeted campaigns for those audiences meant to lead them toward certain outcomes, such as sales conversion.

For example, EVISU now knows that return browsers convert in higher numbers than new ones. When Albert discovered this, he created a campaign dedicated to driving customers back to the site, which increased direct conversions by 25 percent. What's more, shoppers from New York City, Los Angeles, Irvine, Calif., and Pittsburgh were the highest-converting users in the United States. Albert also discovered that users who engaged with “jackets” generated 54 percent higher ROI than those engaging with “jeans.”

On Facebook, people who listed their occupation as “engineer” engaged 300 percent more with EVISU's ads

than other users. Even time of day mattered: Albert uncovered a sweet spot for EVISU — between 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. — when average order value jumped 125 percent.

Pre-Albert, EVISU had no idea that there was growing interest in Germany and France, but after a global campaign to test the waters with ads in German and French, the retailer saw a spike in traffic and conversions. That experiment helped EVISU increase sales from nearly zero in those countries, and today sales in Germany and France account for 10 percent to 15 percent of total online sales in Europe.

Working with Albert has empowered EVISU to shift its focus away from the nitty gritty of the manual execution and management of digital and toward merchandising and creative. Going forward, EVISU wants to diversify its creative and approach to targeting online shoppers in North America with advertising based on their region. For example, a consumer in New York might soon see a different ad than a shopper in San Francisco based on weather and trends in each area.

— Jessica Binns

Fashion Avenue Knits Sweaters

New York, N.Y. | www.fakny.com

NOMINATED BY: Simparel

During ugly-sweater season around the holidays, chances are you've worn one of Fashion Avenue Knits Sweaters' intentionally hideous creations to an office Christmas party or some such festive occasion. "We've had a lot of success with the ugly Christmas sweater — we've become one of the go-to providers" for retail clients including Amazon, Walmart and rue21, says Austin Mallis, vice president of operations for the 30-year-old New York City-based private-label sweater and sports wear company.

Fashion Avenue has developed a "nice-sized business" around ugly sweaters, one of the new areas of growth enabled in recent years by a focus on results-driven technology rollouts. "With the implementation of PLM starting in 2012, we've been able to transform our development process to focus on a lot more styles and SKUs that cater to broader markets which we weren't able to do before," Mallis notes.

The company set its sights on overhauling ERP; its previous system "got us to where we needed to be for long enough" but by the beginning of 2015, Fashion Avenue began its search for a new platform to help manage growth into areas such as juniors, kids and men's apparel and accessories. Though the search ini-

tially stalled — "we didn't see the benefit of the implementation," says Mallis — as its transactional volume increased and Fashion Avenue found itself shipping more styles and processing more purchase orders, it was time for decision-makers to review the company's processes.

Attracted by Simparel ERP's user-friendly and streamlined interface, Fashion Avenue went live with the platform on Jan. 1, 2017. "In the first 75 days, we rewrote how we do things operationally from order entry, purchase order entry, style master, and picking and packing," Mallis explains. All of the company's third-party warehouse partners — which previously ran their own disparate workflows — are using Simparel ERP now, too, and have taken over the receiving process, which is a "big man-hour save for us," adds Mallis. "It's more up to date because they use it as the system of record. It's in their best interest to receive ASAP so they can



get paid as well."

Mallis points out that Simparel's platform requires a lot of set-up work on the front end so that you "build out the software to your specifications." That necessitated "due diligence" with the EDI point person, he says, so that workflows were created based on EDI and style masters. Though that "heavy lifting" took more time than Fashion Avenue anticipated, it allowed the company to be up and running quickly once it went live. Which means more ugly sweaters, coming to a retailer near you.

— Jessica Binns

3.1 Phillip Lim

New York, N.Y. | www.31philliplim.com

NOMINATED BY: RLM Apparel Software | www.ronlynn.com

When Phillip Lim and Wen Zhou founded the eponymous brand in 2005, they wanted to create an approachable designer experience, says Zhou, who is also CEO of the company. “We wanted to offer a luxurious product at an accessible price point.” That mission tapped into a gap in the marketplace for high design that didn’t break the bank, and this year marks the opening of its 17th store, adding to a network of more than 450 points of distribution in more than 50 countries.

That’s a large enterprise to manage, and although 3.1 Phillip Lim had an ERP system in place, it had several limitations, says Zhou. For example, workflows were done outside of the system in Excel, which required manual entry and was prone to error. Getting all of its data into the system was critical to creating efficiencies in its collaborative process, she says. Phillip Lim chose to implement an ERP system from RLM that would allow it to bring all of its data onto one platform.

The changeover process was completed within a four-month timeline, wherein workflows from its legacy system were retrofitted into the new solution, says Zhou. “This included integration points to our POS systems as well as custom developed software elements from our legacy system,” she says.

“We also integrated our financial package in RLM, so we were required to convert our financial systems and evaluate our operational and accounting processes to ensure that they would link up.” The platform was implemented in its DCs in Italy, the United States and Asia, and it was also integrated to Joor for its showroom order taking.

The system has provided many benefits. For example, says Zhou, “RLM allows us to accurately de-

termine our raw materials requirements, which is a critical component to easily purchasing our fabrics and trims.” Additionally, the ability to integrate to its current 3PL model was a critical step to creating efficiencies in its supply chain, she says.

The visibility of information in the system has created efficiencies throughout its supply chain, while eliminating duplicate and manual entry has enabled the company to move through the seasonal lifecycle of its styles with speed and accuracy, she says. “[Having] integration points to external systems has positioned us to expand upon these capabilities, which was a previous limitation.”

Overall, RLM fit seamlessly into Phillip Lim’s company-wide technology initiative to shift to cloud-based resources. “Shifting our workloads to cloud-based targets has minimized our technology footprint and enabled us to be more flexible in the solutions we provide,” says Zhou. While it is not feasible to shift every element of its process to the cloud, the brand developed a hybrid model using on-premise resources and cloud-based solutions in conjunction with RLM to handle images. “This maximizes performance for users inside and outside of the corporate network infrastructure,” Zhou concludes.

— Jordan K. Speer



Ellie Kai

Boston, Mass. | www.elliekai.com

NOMINATED BY: Alvanon | www.alvanon.com

Ellie Kai is the brainchild of Liz Hostetter, who accidentally found herself in the fashion industry after moving to Hong Kong and struggling to find clothes she liked and that fit. She had a few pieces custom tailored to her style and size (Hostetter is 5'11"), and on a visit home to the United States a woman stopped her and asked where she had bought her dress. "I sort of made it myself," Hostetter replied. "Oh, I wish I could do that," replied the admirer. That's when the lightbulb went off: "Women know what they like and what fits, and they want to replicate those things, but with some customization," she says.

Hostetter instinctively and immediately knew she was onto something. "I had no doubt the concept would make sense. I repeatedly heard from women, 'I hate going to the mall.' 'I wish I had this in another color.' 'Nothing fits me.' 'I wish this sleeve were longer.'"

The difficult part wasn't the concept or building a customer base. Hostetter knew she had that in the bag. The challenge was developing a supply chain — specifically, developing sourcing partners who were comfortable with small orders. But she got started, and she found an Asian sourcing partner, Brixon, that could work with her company's size, and was also focused on social responsibility and sustainability, which Hostetter is determined to keep at the core of her business. In her first year, she made 50 garments to order. "I thought I put a man on the moon," she quipped. That was 2011.

Ellie Kai product is sold

primarily through company reps via in-person styling sessions, and online at elliekai.com. In just the past two years, the business has grown by 68 percent to \$6 million and has shipped more than 50,000 customized garments. The company has grown its sales network to 100 sales consultants, two showrooms and more than 20,000 clients across the United States.

This is how it works: Clients try on fit samples — 24 styles, each in sizes 00 through 16 — to find out which size/style combinations work for them, and then customize the garment further by selecting desired fabric (all prints are designed in house) and other attributes such as neckline and sleeve length. Ellie Kai's core designs are extremely thoughtful, incorporating style elements such as an extra panel in its wrap dresses, to protect against revealing too much in a gust of wind, for example, or snaps designed to hold a bra strap in place. In the works is the development of an algorithm-based recommendation engine to further refine the shopping process.



Hostetter sees big potential in the business, because once the company wins a customer, she's going to keep coming back for the killer combo of good fit and customization. Indeed, return rates are incredibly low — just 5.1 percent — a success that Hostetter attributes in large part to Ellie Kai's participation in Alvanon's Wang Mentorship Program, which provided invaluable assistance in strengthening its capabilities with statistical sizing data, technical design tools and training in areas such as production, supply chain issues, fit, marketing and sales. "Our return rates were cut in half within a year of working with Alvanon. My goal is to hit 3 percent this year, 2 percent next year," she says.

There's another reason Hostetter is confident in the business: copious communication between customers and its critically important network of sales consultants. Ellie Kai takes advantage of its one-to-one interactions to learn exactly what they want. That feedback fuels the design of smaller capsule collections that it turns around in just three weeks inside the broader seasonal collection. "One woman said to me, 'I wish I had a halter I could wear with a regular bra.' Why can't we do that? We did."

Ellie Kai is carrying its agility into all aspects of its business. For example, as it enters urban markets where there are challenges with parking and walk-ups and space that might present challenges for styling sessions, the company is modeling a plan to send a short-list of fit samples and fabric swatches to offer a uniquely personalized shopping opportunity to clients.

"Customers need to shop on their terms," says Hostetter, "but fit is the holy grail."

— Jordan K. Speer

Beyond Yoga

Culver City, Calif. | www.beyondyoga.com

NOMINATED BY: RLM Apparel Software | www.ronlynn.com

Beyond Yoga grew out of founder Jodi Guber Brufsky's passion for the Body Positive movement. She saw a gap in the market for activewear that would allow women of all sizes to feel and look great, so in 2006, she launched a company to meet that need.

It was certainly an auspicious time to launch an activewear company, and Beyond Yoga has experienced “explosive growth,” says Michelle Wahler, co-founder and CEO. “Over the past decade, the activewear industry has evolved into a lifestyle, with athleisure becoming a staple in how women dress every day.”

(It also doesn't hurt that there are now 37 million U.S. practitioners of yoga as of 2016, up from 20 million just three years previously.)

“With women around the world adopting athleisure as the new uniform, we have seen a shift in all of our demographics. Our consumer now spans a broad age range and is truly global in scope. With these changes, we have had to quickly adapt to the modern consumer; that means being mobile-friendly and providing more responsive technology,” she says. “We have also had to scale our staffing dramatically over the past several years to support the market demand while still remaining nimble enough to quickly adapt.”

What does responsive technology look like? Beyond Yoga uses Dropbox as its corporate server and file sharing system, G Suite for email, Magento for e-commerce and Zendesk for customer care. It uses the Joor b2b wholesale platform, Pebble Post for international business and Tableau to tackle analytics relative to e-commerce and wholesale demands, says Wahler.

Two years ago, Beyond Yoga transitioned to an ERP system from RLM “to really set the table for our continued growth,” says Wahler. It also implemented RLM's PLM module to manage BOMs, fabric inventory and purchasing requirements, and replaced QuickBooks with RLM's financial module.

RLM acts as the company's centralized hub of information. The cloud-based system allows the company to feed information seamlessly from design, production, sales, accounting and e-commerce into one place, in real time. It is flexible, customizable and scalable, she says.

Wahler says the company rarely develops technology in-house and prefers to rely on experts. When it finds what it needs, it's “fast to move, but also cautious to minimize disruption,” she says, noting that even the “smallest hiccup” can reverberate throughout the organization. And despite predictions from some that it



would “take years and millions of dollars in consulting fees to make the transition” to RLM, the Beyond Yoga team came together and accomplished the migration in a matter of months without consultants, she says.

The benefits of the new ERP system are many: it is easy to use, and each page can be exported to Excel, which makes for “incredibly quick” ad hoc analysis and reporting, says Wahler. The order entry process is about 50 percent faster — which will accelerate further with its addition of Joor — and has fewer errors. Visibility into inventory has improved, allowing for more accurate forecasting, and, because the system virtually feeds in the company's wholesale and e-commerce inventory, “we are able to see everything with a click of a button,” she says. Tasks that previously ate up one to two days now require less than 15 minutes.

The new system jives well with the company's goal to make information virtually available to its employees anywhere and on any device. “Our employees can work at their desks, outside at picnic tables or in conference rooms with the exact same capabilities. We think this makes our team stronger, happier and more productive,” she says.

“Athleisure is a competitive space and we know that in order to continue being as successful as we have been, we always need to be moving forward. This goes for design and fabric innovation, quality and selling, as well as the infrastructure to support all of our amazing people and customers,” Wahler concludes.

— Jordan K. Speer

Stone Cold Fox

Venice, Calif. | www.thestonecoldfox.com

NOMINATED BY: Shopgate | www.shopgate.com

Stone Cold Fox (SCF) is a brand made by women, for women, to empower women by making them feel sexy and confident — which makes sense, what with a name like Stone Cold Fox. The vintage-inspired ladies' lifestyle brand was founded in 2009 by Cydney Morris and Dallas Wand, who became friends in 2nd grade, spent summers together at Parsons New School of Design and later traveled the globe together, absorbing bits of culture and experience that informed the design and aesthetic of their business.

Morris is the mind behind the fabric prints and apparel design, while Wand handles the wholesale and production side of the business. SCF apparel is made exclusively in Los Angeles and sold at retailers such as Nordstrom and Revolve and at its own flagship brick-and-mortar store on the iconic Abbott Kinney Boulevard in Venice Beach, but the bulk of its sales come from its online e-commerce site.

Last year, with the percentage of online traffic coming from mobile hitting the 60 percent mark, the company realized it needed to offer its customers an app. "We already had an optimized mobile version," says Vanessa Gex, director of e-commerce, "but [with respect to] purchasing on the app, it doesn't compare in terms of convenience," she says.

SCF is still a small company and did not have the resources to build and maintain its own app — and who really wants to do that these days anyway, regardless of your size? It chose Shopgate to launch its mobile Android and iOS apps. The mobile commerce platform provider focused on clean design, user-friendly navigation and personalized communication, helping to bring the delicate lace designs and other fine details of SCF's apparel to life. Its template-like structure has kept the in-house workload to a minimum, while still allowing freedom with imagery, fonts, colors and small elements of layout, says Gex, and it integrates seamlessly with its Shopify e-comm platform.

For customers, the app provides an easy way to browse, shop and pay, especially if they already have Apple Pay stored on their phones. "I think people are short on time and to be able to make a purchase in less than five minutes is one of the best things about it," says Gex. The app works on all phones, and does not take up any memory, she says.



Another plus: it's easier to share product socially, she says. "People will talk about us more. You can show someone a dress more easily on an app." Gex thinks that comes in particularly handy for the very successful bridal niche of its business, which includes bridesmaids' dresses and robes.

Since the app's implementation in April 2016, the company has experienced a 5.1 percent conversion rate, a 147 percent average increase in conversions per push notification, and 51x higher conversion rate on app vs. its mobile website.

The opportunity to generate push notifications to communicate new products and sales to its customers is a huge benefit. Gex often watches Google Analytics at these times, and can see the "huge spikes" in activity on the app, and then in sales. She can also see "a handful of customers who will make a purchase every time a push goes out because they don't want to miss out."

It's those types of die-hard loyalists that the app is really for — that's about 5 percent of customers, but they're a crucial component of its business, both as customers and brand ambassadors, and the company wants to make sure to give them what they want. Still, it's careful not to be unfair to online customers by offering too many deals on the app. "We want to make sure all channels are getting equal love," Gex concludes.

— Jordan K. Speer



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Harry Rosen

Toronto, Ontario, Canada | www.harryrosen.com

NOMINATED BY: Jesta I.S. | www.jestais.com

You've seen the headlines: the luxury market as we know it is a thing of the past. For Toronto-based upscale men's wear retailer Harry Rosen, there's increased competition, especially as U.S. chains such as Nordstrom move into the Canadian market and mono-brand stores are opening with increased frequency in key urban markets across the country, says CIO Stephen Jackson.

And with their omnipresent smartphones, customers are savvier than ever. "Thanks to the increase of information available online, there is a greater awareness of the latest trends and key pieces for the season," Jackson continues. "Customers are coming into our stores with their smartphones knowing exactly what they want. Decades ago, men were generally less interested in trends than their female counterparts. But due to the rise of social media, the playing field is levelling."

Amidst this changing climate, Harry Rosen shifted from a best-of-breed approach to technology and adopted Jesta I.S.'s fully integrated ERP solution, which includes POS, inventory, finance and reporting. Now internal support is far less complex and the company has just one vendor to deal with instead of four.

Mobile POS is one of the standout features, operating on HP tablets so that store associates, or "advisors," encounter the same look and feel as the cash wrap. "Advisors do not need to learn two different systems," says Jackson. "It improves our in-store service by allowing our clients to check out from anywhere in the store, thereby elevating the level of service that we can offer."

Jesta I.S.'s deferred sales module also has had a significant impact. Harry Rosen's business relies heavily on

tailored apparel plus made-to-measure apparel from top design houses, leveraging the customer's precise measurements, fabric choice and style preferences. "We want to ensure that everyone looks and feels their best in every garment that they purchase from us," Jackson explains. "That's why we provide complimentary maintenance and repairs for the lifetime of each tailored garment."

With world-class tailors in all of its stores, the deferred sales module helps Harry Rosen deliver on its high standards of service. When a sale is processed, the advisor can discuss with the customer when the garment is needed and this "promise date" gets recorded into the system. The module is tightly integrated into the retailer's Tailor Shop system, which helps to manage resources and ensures that the garment is delivered on time.

Harry Rosen established work flow processes to ensure that every step of the purchase journey is managed properly. For example, when the promise date is set with the customer, the company sends the e-receipt to the advisor as well as automatically adding a calendar entry for the pickup date. This ensures that when the customer comes back to try on the garment, the advisor is on hand to greet him and ensure a proper fit and full satisfaction.

For made-to-measure garments, the processes in place ensure that the order is placed with the designer, and then Harry Rosen tracks when it is supposed to be delivered as well as when it arrives so the advisor can confirm the appointment with the customer.

Harry Rosen also created Virtual Harry as a way of extending its world-class in-store expertise and services to customers who choose to shop at home. A direct conduit to his personal clothing advisor, Virtual Harry enables the shopper to live chat, email or set up an in-store appointment with his advisor of choice. New customers can use Virtual Harry to select a store and pick an in-store advisor for assistance. Customers not comfortable with the online ordering process can order any item of merchandise agreed upon during a consultation — whether by phone, email or live chat — on the spot, with none of the "typical online shopping rigmarole," says Jackson. "Their personal clothing advisor takes care of the entire ordering process and emails a secure link for easy payment."

So far, Virtual Harry has been a hit with customers. "We frequently receive positive feed-



back that this level of expert advice is literally provided at a push of a button as well as the convenience and time savings that they get through this channel,” adds Jackson.

Harry Rosen is using Jesta I.S. business intelligence tools to make smarter decisions. With a fully mobile system, buyers can run analytics from anywhere in the world and analyze sales and inventory by size and lo-

cation, with powerful filter capabilities based on an unlimited number of product attributes.

“We are excited about what this tool can do for us in the future, specifically to tie online traffic information by product into our analytics so we know not only what people are buying but what they are researching and looking at,” says Jackson.

— Jessica Binns

Gerson & Gerson Inc.

New York, N.Y. | www.gersonandgerson.com

SELF-NOMINATED

Sometimes, all innovation requires is the collision of two separate bodies to send both in a third and brand new direction, and that’s exactly what happened when the 80-year-old girls’ dress manufacturer Gerson & Gerson brought on a new vice president to open opportunities for the company. That VP, Mark Mignone, has deep experience in retail, a corresponding network of connections, and a love of collaboration. When he came to Gerson & Gerson, Mignone saw possibilities to take the brand into channels it hadn’t been before.

Back in 2013, when he was working at Kaltex (another Innovator winner), Mignone was introduced by Hebe Schecter to the acclaimed designer and HSN celebrity Jeffrey Banks, and the two hit it off over sushi. When he got to Gerson & Gerson, Mignone had an idea: why not take children’s wear to HSN? He called Banks, and the two started a conversation. That led to a visit from Banks to see the company’s operations and its apparel. The Toby Award-winning designer is no stranger to children’s wear. Years ago Banks designed boys’ wear lines for retailers including Neiman Marcus and Lord & Taylor, and he was wowed by the beautiful designs and quality of the dresses. Or, as Mignone puts it, “He looked like a kid in a candy store.”

The collaboration between Banks and the Gerson & Gerson team began

then and there, and the rest, as they say, is history. Although the company is famous for its dresses, the team decided that for HSN, it would lead with an apparel item that would be a great gift idea, and that it would specifically target grandparents as buyers. “We wanted something that grandmothers would love to buy for their grandchildren and we decided on designer swaddles for babies,” said Mignone. The swaddles aired three times in November 2016 and sold out; five other pieces in the collection were sold online. Product was packaged in beautiful matte gift boxes. “We wanted the presentation to be perfect. We wanted the customer to feel great about it,” he says.

Gerson & Gerson’s introduction to TV home shopping was a great success, but its sleek on air execution belies a tough planning and numbers game that goes on behind the scenes, says Mignone. This is a tough business. Your merchandise doesn’t get to sit around and languish on shelves. Time on TV home selling networks goes to products that can bring in the biggest sales per minute, and producing those numbers requires smart planning and careful targeting. “We have to educate the consumer that they can buy children’s clothing on HSN,” he says. The company is already planning its 2017 line, and this year will reveal some new mother/daughter



sets in addition to items just for boys and girls.

Because it is a new category for the network, the company was careful to target a particular segment of the population (grandmas) with a particular product (gift items for their grandchildren), but merchandising to this segment has its own fine nuances. For example, because grandparents don’t typically live with their grandchildren and might not be seeing them for a while, the on-air segment made sure to remind watchers that children might need a different size by the time the gift is given.

“You have to forecast that the kid will grow. You may have to plan. We have to get inside the grandmas’ heads. It may take us a while to perfect the merchandising, but HSN has 91 million unique viewers, and we are going to capture a lot of them,” says Mignone.

— Jordan K. Speer

thredUP Inc.

San Francisco, Calif. | www.thredup.com

NOMINATED BY: Mad Street Den | www.madstreetden.com

It's a sign of the times that an online secondhand apparel store is running a national TV advertising campaign — and that there is a large online secondhand apparel store to begin with.

Back in the day, shopping at a secondhand store either meant you were watching your pennies — due to need or thrift — or that you were seeking a “vintage” look with clothes from somebody's grandmother's closet.

And while it's surely no coincidence that the idea for thredUP came to co-founder James Reinhart in 2008 — smack in the middle of the Great Recession — its arrival as a big player in the apparel space signals the growing prominence of a number of other cultural trends, namely, sustainability, sharing and simplicity.

Yes, thredUP is about convenient and affordable access to top brands and styles — on thredUP, shoppers can snag current styles for as much as 90 percent off first-run prices. But it's also about reducing occupied space in landfills, easing overfull closets, saving water, reducing the use of pesticides and dyes, and recycling. And while there are many apparel companies now that are striving to recycle garments by turning them into something new, thredUP offers the opportunity to recycle without changing the garment, just the person who's wearing it.

To empty their bulging closets, sellers simply request a “Clean Out” bag from thredUP that arrives with a free shipping label and that they can fill and leave on their doorstep for pick up. Sellers have the option to select “donate,” and turn their closets into cash for organizations including Big Brothers Big Sisters and Feeding America, or they can receive site credit or a cash payout

for a small fee that covers shipping and processing costs. Once the bag is received, the company takes it from there, photographing and pricing items using a proprietary algorithm and posting them online.

Reinhart developed the idea for the thredUP marketplace in 2008 when he looked in his closet and couldn't find anything to wear. It began as a pilot for peer-to-peer online sharing of men's shirts, and is now the world's largest online marketplace for buying and selling women's and kids' secondhand clothes.

Unlike your traditional neighborhood thrift store where you might find a garment that is genuinely vintage (or just horribly old and unfashionable, and possibly torn and stained), thredUP sells up-to-the-moment styles, thoroughly vetting its garments to make sure they are on trend and in perfect shape. “Often you can find the exact same items you'd find in retail stores, just at much lower prices,” says Chris Homer, chief technology officer.

Still, with hundreds of thousands of unique items, thredUP's challenge is to show a customer the “right” products in her size, style and price point. Enter AI Stylist, powered by Vue.ai, a unique way of recommending products based on a customer's previous purchase history, style preferences, and the products that a customer is browsing. Using products that the customer has added to the cart or previously purchased (accessed through the Closet feature on the My thredUP page), AI Stylist recommends “Style it with” products, while the “Recommendations” page on My thredUP always shows a fresh selection of 100 items



recommended specifically for the customer — no human involved.

Beyond that, AI Stylist can determine the reasons behind a customer's attraction to a garment — i.e., is the customer looking at a dress because she likes its shape, or its color, or its pattern? — during a browsing session and adjust recommendations in real time.

In short, buyers can get what they like at a fraction of the cost, and sellers can buy new clothes without guilt, knowing they can resell them.

“We're trying to inspire people to think secondhand first,” says Homer. “We know that shopping secondhand helps the world in some small way, and we're proud to be a part of that. Being a conscious consumer matters. It matters to you, it matters to us, it matters in the whole big picture of the world.”

— Jordan K. Speer

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infor.com/fashion



Kaltex

Naucalpan de Juarez, Mexico | www.kaltex.com

NOMINATED BY: Walter Wilhelm Associates | www.walterwilhelmassoc.com

Lectra | www.lectra.com ■ BDO | www.bdo.com

Kaltex is a company on the move. In business for nearly 100 years, Kaltex has built a strong textile and apparel business in Mexico, capitalizing on that success by establishing an office in New York City as it focuses on new markets and expanding the business. Like many companies, Kaltex, a vertically integrated enterprise, started in manufacturing, then got into retail, into a brand focus and now is chasing the consumer. It operates facilities in Colombia and runs an apparel manufacturing factory in Nicaragua.

When Kaltex America president and CEO Hebe Schecter assumed leadership nearly three years ago, she set her sights on positioning Kaltex to be a business disruptor. “We put a different strategy in place — not just product innovation but trying to get close to the consumer,” she says.

Part of its approach to getting closer to the customer involves improving the product, moving from a core product to a more fashion-focused offering and embracing the lifestyle-brand trend. For example, says Schecter, 21-year-old kids are wearing Carhartt-style jackets for fashion, not as an industrial work wear uniform. Succeeding in a new apparel retail

environment means breaking down old, established limits, she adds.

While Kaltex operates more than 650 stores in Mexico under the Milano, Melody and Home&Fashion brands, it has no plans to open brick-and-mortar locations in the United States. Instead, the company is looking to its e-commerce business to gather valuable insights into what customers want, especially the Millennial demographic. “We’re trying to

attract a customer who is much smarter than we are,” Schecter explains.

Kaltex has been working with its supplier partners to upgrade its denim program, which relies on innovative fabric blends to create a fashion-forward portfolio. As the focus on product increased, Kaltex looked for a PLM platform to streamline and accelerate product development, selecting Lectra’s Fashion PLM solution with support from Walter Wilhelm Associates. Prior to the Lectra implementation, the culture at Kaltex was very Excel-oriented. The company wanted a system that would include pre-development features, such as a fabric library cataloging all fabric specifications, and eventually interface with pattern making and marker making tools.

Now Kaltex leverages Lectra Fashion PLM to manage product development — and develop products more accurately — across all brands. “This is allowing us to analyze better, and develop less, actually,” Schecter notes.

In the near future, Kaltex has plans to adopt 3D pattern making, which it expects to be a “game changer,” adds Schecter.

— Jessica Binns



Future Retail

Mumbai, India | www.futureretail.in

NOMINATED BY: Infor | www.infor.com

Future Retail Limited — similar to a multi-brand big-box chain like Target — started in 2001, and has rapidly grown to become a top retailer in India with 738 retail stores in 221 cities across the country, pulling in annual revenue of roughly \$1.1 billion and serving 295 million customers in 2016. Fashion comprises about 30 percent of the company’s business, represented in 58 Fashion @ Big Bazaar (fbb) standalone stores as well as locations

within some of Future Retail’s 280 Big Bazaar stores in more than 100 cities.

“With one specific idea of making India *thoda aur* stylish (a little more stylish), we have made it our mission to provide stylish quality fashion at pocket-friendly prices. Bringing global trends to Indian homes at inexpensive prices is what fbb is all about,” says Ashok Dharadhar, chief, retail & head business processes for Fashion @ Big Bazaar. Custom-

ers can shop a range of labels from private brands including DJ&C, Buffalo, Srishti, Knighthood, Spunk, Pink & Blue and others, plus a special line of Lee Cooper Original fashion exclusive to fbb and Disney merchandise for kids.

Managing so many brands and product drops comes with its fair share of complexity. The company was using Microsoft Office for product data management and communication between design, category, sourcing and vendors. Employees manually maintained all style information in Excel spreadsheets, from tech packs and sample tracking to first-cost calculations and vendor-costing comparisons, and design and category teams relied on emails to share these Excel spreadsheets. “If the versions of Excel files were not properly maintained, then there was a possibility of different people accessing different versions of tech packs,” says Prasham Kamdar, managing partner, Ptex Solutions, a strategic PLM partner. “This could potentially lead to errors in sample making, costing and more.”

Complicating things further, vendors were sending daily bulk production updates by email, which were then entered into Excel spreadsheets. However, consolidating all of this data across styles, orders and vendors was a “Herculean task,” Kamdar adds. “If there were any delays in any orders, the sourcing team would find out very late,” he says. fbb lacked real-time updates of where goods were, whether or not production had started, the status of packing, and whether shipments had reached the warehouse.

Prior to any review meetings, various staff members from various departments tracked down and entered data into Excel in reporting templates. “Teams used to

work very hard just to collect information from different stakeholders and present it in the form of reports,” Kamdar explains. “Assuming that all the data was correctly entered, by the time the report was reviewed, the information was outdated.”

Future Retail wanted to use PLM to streamline business processes and gain greater visibility across the business lifecycle, maintain a central database that stores all design and development data in one place, protect critical intellectual property, and, says Dharadhar, access information for better, faster and more informed decision making.

The Infor Fashion PLM implementation launched without customization in August 2015 and went live in Dec. 2015 as scheduled. Currently used by 250 employees across 34 brands and 11 departments in Mumbai and Bangalore, PLM has been used to create 17,000 styles over the past four seasons (from SS 16 to AW 17).

All brands and departments leverage a centralized library of 80 grade rules and 7,000 colors. To further amplify its effect, PLM is tightly integrated with applications ranging from master data management and Manthan business intelligence to MockShop visual merchandising and seasonal and bulk calendar management, provided by TNA. fbb now uses mobile apps such as Style Creation for designing styles on the go and the Line List app for line presentation.

Future Retail anticipates 20 percent growth this year as it penetrates further into the Indian market and brings a wider assortment of products and categories to the Indian consumer.

— Jessica Binns

Komar

Jersey City, N.J. | www.komarbrands.com

NOMINATED BY: TUKATECH | www.tukatech.com

Komar, in business since 1908, generated \$850 million in 2016 sales, and maintains 30 women’s sleepwear brands, nine lingerie brands, seven base layer brands and 35 children’s sleepwear brands, in addition to factories throughout 12 countries and distribution centers in the United States and Europe.

Last year Komar began a 3D design pilot with Sri Lanka’s Star Garment using a software suite from TUKATECH, including TUKA3D and TUKAcloud. Jeff Steinhart, president of sourcing and produc-

tion at Komar, says his team appreciated TUKATECH’s information sharing capabilities and “its orientation to technical spec and pattern information.

“Also, TUKA was already being used at a group of factories recently acquired by our company so we could see its abilities first hand,” Steinhart adds.

Komar decided to implement TUKATECH with one of its more straightforward divisions — sleepwear — where styling doesn’t change dramatically from



one season to another, before expanding to additional brands and groups. Says Steinhart, “Similar styling builds a base which can be used to create a new style with minimal change.” The company has two to four employees, including designer, technical designer and a pattern maker, on the in-house design team for each brand.

TUKA3D is especially helpful for reviewing all-over prints and for print placement. “Since the prints can be reviewed in correct scale to the garment, the 3D image verifies print size and placement before actual prints are put into work, which is a potential saving of time and money,” explains Steinhart.

After six months of using TUKA3D to improve the look and fit of prototype garments, divisions involved in the pilot program have reduced the number of physical proto samples made by 40 percent. This

in turn has reduced product development time and cut costs related to sample making. “The 3D process has also allowed us to create additional e-samples beyond what we could achieve with physical samples in the same time period,” explains Steinhart. “Beyond the cost savings, we are improving the quality of our styles by increasing the number of feedback loops to make our products exactly as our design teams envision.”

Steinhart points to one specific example of how TUKA3D made a concrete difference. In working to place a to-scale print of selvage to selvage umbra stripe, Komar used TUKA3D to create versions of the print and applied them in garment form, placed exactly as intended. “The TUKA system was able to show us in 3D how the stripe placement would appear on the garment, showing several options along with

yardage consumption for each version,” Steinhart explains. “We could make decisions as to which option appeared best with the least yield without putting any fabric or samples into work.”

While 3D sampling has improved Komar’s overall process, visualizing very intricate fabric details remains a challenge. “Small details such as pin tucks or pico edges do not appear as realistic as desired,” notes Steinhart. “The team of skilled 3D renderers [is] consistently being challenged to create ways of overcoming these visual issues.”

Komar gets a 3D sample within three to five days, once the design team confirms the mocks and the patterns are sent. For the future, Komar is looking at ways to use the 3D system to provide images for display or store layout presentations and as a selling tool for sales teams.

— Jessica Binns

Cath Kidston

West London, UK | www.cathkidston.com

NOMINATED BY: Infor | www.infor.com

Known as a modern vintage fashion brand, Britain’s Cath Kidston has won over fans with its quirky, whimsical prints, all designed in house. Launched in 1993, today the brand spans the globe with 145 total stores at the end of 2016, 125 of which are in Asia. It entered India last year and has its sights set on Latin America. Products range from women’s apparel and children’s wear to accessories and home furnishings.

To manage growth and evolve the business, Cath Kidston knew the outmoded systems it was using were no longer sufficient for the next phase of growth. Cath Kidston’s business transformation is supported through Infor CloudSuite Fashion, which will deliver enhanced visibility for the brand, tighten processes and reduce time-consuming manual re-keying of data, which can create costly errors. The cloud-based solution, which will support all business areas — from PLM, purchasing, merchandise inventory management and financials, to business intelligence and industry-specific analytics — will also help Cath Kidston to reduce its IT footprint, significantly expedite time to market and reduce risk.



As Cath Kidston is preparing to be fully operational in the cloud, all employees will have access to real-time information and once fully live, the retailer will be the first in the UK to completely operate in the cloud.

“Infor’s investment in, and commitment to building tailored functionality for the fashion and retail industries is unparalleled and having reviewed the market, we had no hesitation in selecting Infor Cloudsuite Fashion,” said Geert Peeters, Cath Kidston COO. “Having a fashion-

focused retail solution delivered via the cloud means that we will benefit quickly from having all our key systems totally integrated. Furthermore, its modern, smartphone-esque interface is slick and intuitive to use, which is hugely beneficial in encouraging user adoption and getting the most out of the system.”

“Working with a provider which could support financials on a global basis and provide 24/7 support, par-

ticularly in countries which operate within a more complex taxation and regulatory framework, was crucial, and having access to this level of capability, combined with the ability to support the dynamics and nuances of a unique fashion business, means that we have immense confidence as we move forward in the next chapter of our growth,” Peeters added.

— Jessica Binns

Kenai Sports

New Britain, Conn. | www.kenaisports.com

SELF-NOMINATED

They say one man’s trash is another man’s treasure, and that couldn’t be more true of Kenai Sports. This innovative sportswear brand makes clothing out of trash. Yes, you heard that right. Trash. Each day, the company removes or diverts “tons” of plastic bottles, cell phone cases, keyboards, and organic waste such as coconut shells, corn husks, soybean shells, and more, from landfills, and then turns it into sportswear. Not only does the company eliminate trash from landfills and recycle it into useable items, but it also does all of that here in North America, providing jobs and helping to boost the local economy.

Kenai didn’t enter the market as a sportswear brand that wanted to be sustainable. It started with a sustainable business model, and built its company on top of it, says co-founder and COO Charlie Bogoian. “Sustainability ... defines the product we make for our partners, our role in innovating the apparel industry, and the metrics by which we measure our value in the marketplace.”

Kenai wasn’t Bogoian’s first apparel venture. While still in school at Babson College, he and his business partner Phil Tepfer had some early success launching a nautical clothing company called Sail Proud LLC. But the entrepreneurial duo realized that maintaining their momentum would require a business model that

held more long-term value.

At about that time, they saw the popular video, “The Story of Stuff,” which focuses on excess consumerism and the lifecycle of material goods, and the partners saw how this played out in the apparel industry in general. “People buy more than they can consume. They donate. They throw out. ... No matter your political leanings, landfills are a finite resource. Why not have businesses try to conserve that?”

That, in a nutshell, is how the company got its start.

Kenai has a wide range of customers, ranging from college and university athletic programs to corporations, non-profits, and government offices, for which it creates custom-designed performance sportswear for their teams, clubs and employees. “Sustainability has become an increasingly important factor for many organizations, and we’ve seen signs of that by some of the inquiries we’re getting for new garments and uniforms,” says Bogoian.

Kenai’s unique business model hasn’t escaped notice. The company has been featured in publications including *Bloomberg Businessweek*, *Entrepreneur Magazine*,



The Hartford Business Journal and *The Wall Street Journal*.

From a product standpoint, Kenai’s clothing is audited — organic actually means something and the company is dedicated to providing a product that truly provides protection to the environment as well as comfort to the wearer, says Bogoian.

When it comes to operations, the company is every bit as environmentally focused. Its transparent, locally-based supply chain allows for collaborative relationships and makes it easy for consumers to have confidence in the socially-conscious nature of the company’s production, he says.

Kenai has also taken its recycling efforts to the next level with its “closed loop” program, which allows customers to send garments back at the end of their useful life to be broken down and re-entered into the production process. “A fully-functional ‘closed loop’ elevates the possibilities in sustainable business,” he concludes.

— Jordan K. Speer

Toad&Co.

Santa Barbara, Calif. | www.toadandco.com

NOMINATED BY: Oracle NetSuite Global Business Unit | www.netsuite.com

Toad&Co., the socially inspired and sustainably built “trail-to-tavern” apparel brand, has been around for more than 25 years, so if you’re scratching your head, and wondering why it’s not ringing a bell, it might be because the company changed its name two years ago from Horny Toad. More on that later.

Twenty years ago, Toad’s current CEO bought the company from its founder, who launched it in 1991 out of her garage in Telluride, Colo., selling nothing but fleece hats. In the intervening years, the company has grown significantly, and now operates two retail stores (in Portland, Ore., and Freeport, Maine), a partner store in Golden, Colo., sells direct-to-consumer via its e-commerce site, and wholesale via more than 800 doors nationwide, including at retailers such as REI.

The brand also has a longtime social mission to help adults with disabilities. In 1997 it co-founded PAC, a third-party logistics provider that trains and provides jobs to adults with developmental disabilities. One hundred percent of Toad’s picking and packing is carried out by these workers. It also partnered starting in 2001 with the non-profit Search, Inc. to send adults with disabilities on vacations into the great outdoors.

The bulk of Toad’s business — 70 percent — remains in wholesale, but in recent years its direct-to-consumer (d2c) business has been chipping away at the overall pie. Today, its two brick-and-mortar stores represent about 10 percent of revenues and its e-comm business the other 20 percent. “Direct-to-consumer business is growing north of 40 percent, year over year,” says Kelly Milazzo, vice president of operations.



With d2c on the rise and no longer an insignificant percentage of business, Toad needed to transform its IT systems to allow it to become a true omnichannel retailer. “The consumer is not differentiating between channels,” says Milazzo. “We needed to be able to treat them as one customer regardless of where we interact with them,” she says.

In May 2016, the company went live with the core ERP piece of the Oracle NetSuite Retail Apparel platform, including financials, order management, inventory management, reporting, point of sale and retail apparel-specific processes. It will be live with Suite Commerce Advanced, the e-comm portion, by July of this year.

One of the system’s features Milazzo most appreciates is its dashboard, which allows Toad to manage by exception (it has provided

a 30 percent increase in efficiency in order management alone), while the real-time intelligent view into its KPIs has been invaluable. Toad can see how money is being spent, and how this is tracking to its goals. It has insight into, for example, the performance of new styles vs. carryover styles within a season. “It’s much easier to get to that answer by logging into a dashboard,” says Milazzo. Because it is cloud-based, the system is extremely flexible.

Last month, it added the SuiteCommerce InStore POS solution to its Freeport store to give sales associates single views into inventory and customers, which allows them to better serve shoppers. “They love all of its visuals and are finding it very intuitive,” says Milazzo. When the new web site rolls out this summer, customers, too, will gain one view of

inventory, and one view of their purchase history, across channels.

One more thing about that uptick in e-comm: It was also a big driver behind the name change. You see, with a name like Horny Toad, you

can encounter some troubles with your email marketing. There are some “digital restrictions” when it comes to trying to reach your consumers — especially, ahem, at work, quips Milazzo. “Emails would end

up in their spam. As our company continues to see growth and as the world moves to a digital landscape, we needed to evaluate having that [word] in our name.”

— Jordan K. Speer

Silver Jeans

Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada | www.silverjeans.com

NOMINATED BY: Bronto | www.bronto.com

Silver Jeans, the denim brand that does \$150 million in sales across the United States, Europe and Southeast Asia, has made tremendous strides in digital marketing in recent years. The most amusing example might be its “Love Below the Waist” YouTube web series launched around Valentine’s Day 2017 and depicting two pairs of jeans as they embark on their love story. Billed as “sassy, cheeky and sometimes straight-up ridiculous,” the rom-com is one of Silver Jeans’ more interesting approaches to digitally engaging with customers.

But without an overhaul of its digital marketing program in 2014, when director of e-commerce Mike Girardin joined the company, something like “Love Below the Waist” probably wouldn’t have happened. Prior to his arrival, Silver Jeans was underutilizing email as a marketing vehicle. Girardin describes a marketing program that sent out random emails with no fixed plan — no consistency, common threads of messaging segmentation or anything other than “batch and blast.”

Working with email marketing automation provider Bronto, Silver Jeans took the first basic step of segmenting its audience, separating Canada from the United States, for example. Marketing and e-commerce wanted to send out a “few more emails without bothering people or causing unsubscribes,” says Girardin. “We wanted to test what kind of frequency we could get away with.”

As Silver Jeans began sending out more emails to

customers, it discovered that the response improved with each one. “It’s a compounding effect,” Girardin explains. While one email might generate 1x revenue and two emails might yield 2x revenue, four emails will drive 6x revenue. “Part of it is that you’re staying fresh in people’s memories. You’ve got to hit them up a certain number of times before they recognize your existence.”

Silver Jeans also launched automated triggered emails, such as a welcome message or an abandoned cart email. Messaging varies from offering a discount to highlighting various features on the website to promoting Silver Jeans’ denim fit guide.

Experimenting with A/B testing has been a learning experience. For example, Girardin’s team discovered that despite the conventional wisdom that short email subject lines are better, “an effective subject line is unintuitively long,” he explains. On Black Friday, his team tested messages simply promoting an offer versus saying something “a little more interesting” in the subject line. “‘Black Friday’ works a lot better,” Girardin notes. “People are searching their email inbox for ‘Black Friday,’ so if you don’t use it, they can’t find it.”

So far the marketing efforts are paying off: from October 2015 to October 2016, online sales grew 40 percent and sales are expected to rise by as much as 30 percent this year.

Says Girardin, “We’ve gone from doing nothing to doing a whole lot of things.”

— Jessica Binns



REI

Kent, Wash. | www.rei.com**NOMINATED BY:** KNAPP Logistics Automation | www.knapp.com

“Increasingly, we as a society are asking, ‘what is a purposeful life?’ Whether you’re a Baby Boomer or a Millennial, part of answering that question is, ‘how did I feel purposeful in the life work that I did?’”

That’s how REI vice president of supply chain Rick Bingle describes not only his passion about his work but that of the many REI employees attracted to the brand’s mission of encouraging adventure in and stewardship of the great outdoors.

The co-op took that mission one step further with the opening of its newest distribution center in Goodyear, Ariz., last year. A future-forward model of sustainability, the DC was built on four very specific design tenets: brand, culture, sustainability and technology. Before REI had even purchased the land, the company gathered all stakeholders, including the designer, developer, builder, sustainability experts and material handling providers KNAPP and DMW&H, to collaborate on a plan that would meet those tenets and took just 18 months to open the DC.

The result is a DC that looks and feels more like one of REI’s stores

when you pull into the parking lot and approach the entrance. “We want employees to recognize that they’re working for a differentiated company,” explains Bingle. “We want you to experience the brand as soon as you get out of your car, whether you’re walking through the outdoor garden or trails or using the gym.”

It’s also the first DC in the country that’s both certified LEED Platinum and energy net neutral, thanks to a rooftop solar array that generates so much power it actually returns energy to the grid.

And while all of the sustainability efforts and aesthetic elements are wonderful, such as the cacti and desert flora that populate the gardens, it’s REI’s new approach to material handling and production that’s truly innovative and attracting notice. Aiming to achieve something unique in the industry, says Bingle, REI has enabled omnichannel one-touch production in the Goodyear DC, bringing together two disparate systems that, working in tandem, allow an employee to pick items for both store replenishment and direct-to-consumer in one fell swoop.

Here’s how it works. KNAPP’s order storage and retrieval (OSR) system brings a donor tote full of product to a worker’s goods-to-person station. The station’s graphic, intuitive display instructs which item to pick and put into one of the cardboard boxes that the OSR also brought.

This is the retail replenishment side, enabling workers to pick product that is destined for stores. As the cardboard box fills, you hit a button, the box ejects, a new box comes in, you put a lid on the filled box, add the shipping and contents label, and shuttle the box off for shipping.

But the fundamental differentiator, says Bingle, is the pocket sorter — which enables the direct-to-consumer portion — also located at the worker’s station. He likens it to the technology you find at the dry cleaners; you press a button, the rack of clothing flies around, and voila! Your garment magically appears in front of you.

So that means the worker can pick orders for both stores and for DTC from the same pool of inventory and at the same station. The display that tells the worker to pick one item for stores will also include instructions for picking for DTC. And if a customer order includes two or more items, the products are picked more than likely by separate employees with separate pocket sorters and shuttled to a third location for packaging. There’s no barcode to scan, saving critical time, and if the employee puts the wrong item in the wrong box, the display will catch the error and force the worker to fix it before continuing.

REI partnered with the National Organization on Disability, inviting the group to review the goods-to-person stations and getting the



thumbs up to actively recruit persons with certain disabilities for these jobs. For example, says Bingle, being deaf in a typical warehouse is perilous, what with the forklifts zipping around and heavy equipment being moved. “Sound is part of the safety protocol,” explains Bingle. “Because goods-to-

person stations are protected, the inability to hear is no longer compromising your safety. Your disability has nothing to do with your ability to run one of these stations.”

For people with autism, being easily distracted is a typical challenge. Yet as long as they can master the very “rote” picking process, says

Bingle, they can thrive in a picking capacity at a goods-to-person station. “People with autism have been so cut out of the work environment and this technology changes that,” Bingle adds. “Working with the National Organization on Disability opens new doors to hiring pools.”

— Jessica Binns

PVH Corp.

New York, N.Y. | www.pvh.com

NOMINATED BY: JDA | www.jda.com

PVH Corp. is one of largest global apparel companies, with \$8.2 billion in 2016 revenues coming from a diversified portfolio of brands — including CALVIN KLEIN, Tommy Hilfiger, Van Heusen, IZOD, ARROW, Speedo, Warner’s and Olga, as well as numerous other owned and licensed brands. The company employs approximately 35,000 associates, operating across 40 countries.

When you’re operating with so many brands, products and people, old-school tech systems simply won’t do. PVH’s planning teams were challenged by Excel-based tools, linked files and manual processes.

“Much of the work was being done in disparate systems,” said Ken Duane, CEO, Heritage Brands and North America Wholesale. “The manual process to aggregate regional demand, against capacity, into a global purview, was time consuming.”

PVH has used JDA’s planning and allocation tools for more than 15 years. Last year, it implemented a suite of JDA planning solutions that brought end-to-end visibility to the entire supply chain — aligning demand, fulfillment and capacity planning.

The enterprise planning module allowed PVH to create strong financial plans at the category level and to plan seasonally, providing insight into its margin mix by season. The size-and-pack module, updated allocation modules and launch of JDA AP has enabled PVH to optimize inventory productivity and localize assortments, Duane says.

Demand planning tools enable PVH to forecast at a channel level and cluster certain demand groups. It also allows the company to spot trends sooner and help better communicate with both its retail and sourcing partners. The fulfillment module allows PVH to optimize fill rates across channels by providing it with the functionality to manage inventories at a more granular level.

KPIs, reporting language and processes are more standardized because all divisions are operating on the same platform. “With configurable dashboarding we are able to



quickly produce an executive overview of what is going on in the business,” says Duane. “Associates are able to shift their focus away from less value-added items such as data entry, to more strategic thinking and data analysis.”

On the wholesale side, Duane said that having a long-range forecast at multiple levels has been a “huge win” and gives the company the ability to challenge its own thinking and to be more responsive and flexible with its orders. On the retail side, he said that PVH’s businesses can now refine assortments at the store-cluster level, taking into account factors such as climate, customer type, and store size and volume. He added that PVH is now able to adjust future forecasts and inventories to meet shifting consumer buying habits as the company adapts to the convergence of the digital and physical worlds.

“We have moved the business forward significantly by introducing JDA tools that help us optimize inventory, maximize sales and satisfy our consumer,” says Duane. “For example, after the introduction of the Van Heusen Flex Collar shirt, we saw strong sales in the largest sizes. Having a streamlined and integrated planning tool allowed us to quickly adjust future production to ensure our retail customers were fully in-stock to support future sales.”

— Jordan K. Speer

VF Jeanswear

Greensboro, N.C. | www.vfc.com

NOMINATED BY: Browzwear | www.browzwear.com

Jean design, fit, and manufacture, what with all the washing, shrinkage, dry finishes, embellishments and more. VF Jeanswear knows this all too well, producing large volumes of jeans annually through its Wrangler, Lee, Riders by Lee, Crafted by Lee, and Rock & Republic denim brands.

3D patternmaker Margarita Pasakarnis says the company partnered with Browzwear in Feb. 2012 to transform pattern making and product development with Vstitcher and Lotta 3D design software, starting in the mass women's department of the Jeanswear group. "There are functions in the software that indicate what the avatar-model feels virtually," she explains. "So we could ask our fit model what she feels in the same physical garment and translate that to the virtual pattern."

With the move to 3D pattern making and design, decisions are made virtually, which means VF Jeanswear produces fewer physical samples. "Appearance of the

product is much better, and the fit quality is higher," Pasakarnis says, "which leads to increased sales." What's more, there's better communication among stakeholders, a better record of all design decisions stored in the software, and a more consistent approach to design.

As a result of the Browzwear implementation, the Jeanswear group has completely redesigned its product development process. The software's virtual capabilities mean that the mass women's team can use assets before they receive physical samples; for example, they may not have fabric yardage, but as long as a swatch is available they can test and use it virtually before making any fabric decisions. Adds Pasakarnis, "all that's needed are images to begin working in 3D." With virtual libraries of images, fabrics, trims and finishes, her team can begin product development earlier than before.

VF Asia, the China-based group that executes the samples, has embraced the virtual development process too. "It's good when people are

enjoying the process of innovation," Pasakarnis notes. "That's 50 percent of the success."

While adopting Browzwear has changed how the Jeanswear's mass women's group approaches fit and pattern development, individual pattern makers use the software to varying degrees. More than 30 pattern makers have been trained in Vstitcher for fit development and "approximately 25 percent of us use it for 100 percent of pattern development," says Pasakarnis.

"Software is not going to make you a designer. Software is not going to make you a patternmaker," explains Pasakarnis. "Only in a master's hand you can create a masterpiece using great tools, and Vstitcher and Lotta are great tools."

The use of Vstitcher has spread to men's, boys', infants' and toddlers', and plus sizes for fit development in Jeanswear. "We needed to prove virtual development was possible in mass women's and establish a process before we spread to other departments," adds Pasakarnis.

A few small "rush" collections have been sold virtually to buyers. "You cannot create a small collection in five days, because it takes three weeks to make one jean sample. But because we were able to create it virtually and have the buyer accept it virtually, we were able to create a collection in five days. We would not have been able to present a collection on such short notice otherwise," explains Pasakarnis.

VF Jeanswear has a long history with its hometown college, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG), regularly recruiting interns and graduates from the Department of Consumer, Apparel, and Retail Studies. To better educate ap-



parel design students, the company worked with Browzwear to outfit all the terminals in the department's computer lab with the 3D design

software. "I have trained five faculty members who now know the software and are able to use it in the curriculum," explains Pasakarnis, who

has also taught the software directly to UNCG students "who learn the software so quickly."

— Jessica Binns

Xcel Brands

New York, N.Y. | www.xcelbrands.com

NOMINATED BY: NGC Software | www.ngcsoftware.com

Xcel Brands is not your typical apparel company; it's not your typical media company; and it's not your typical licensing company. When it was launched in 2011, founder and president Bob D'Loren had a vision to reimagine shopping, entertainment and social as one entity. The result is a brand development and media company engaged in the design, production, licensing, marketing and direct-to-consumer sales of branded apparel, footwear, accessories, jewelry, home goods and other consumer products, and in the acquisition of dynamic consumer lifestyle brands.

In its brand portfolio? Isaac Mizrahi, H Halston, C. Wonder, Judith Ripka and Highline Collective, which it promotes through an omnichannel sales strategy that includes direct-response television, internet, brick-and-mortar retail, and e-commerce channels.

Xcel operates under three umbrellas: interactive TV (creating media broadcasts in nine countries, generating \$350 million in annual sales); specialty retail (which handles brand extensions into products as diverse as BAND-AIDS and tissue boxes, sold at retailers such as Best Buy and Staples); and wholesale.

"Our brands are dynamic, in that we have authentic personalities who drive [connection and interest] via social media. We're one of the few companies at QVC that can cross-promote on air," says D'Loren. "Consider Isaac Mizrahi, who knits and paints. We launched a line of yarn at Michael's for which he created a DIY video, and then he spoke on his show on QVC on that Monday night. That's powerful."

As for the wholesale apparel side of its business, D'Loren describes it as "licensing 4.0." A far cry from your typical licensing model, Xcel operates a design-to-retail supply chain for customers including Hudson's Bay, Lord & Taylor and most recently, Dillard's, where it just launched H Halston in



150 doors. Xcel Brands essentially operates as a vertical retailer without owning any of the inventory. It doesn't sell the product; rather, its revenues come from a percentage of top-line sales. Although it collaborates with its retail customers in areas such as planning and identifying trends, Xcel Brands does all the design, sourcing and marketing work, says D'Loren. "The retailers take the inventory risk."

Recently, taking a page from the world of fast fashion, Xcel has been working to achieve faster turnaround times and also to keep a close watch on sales data so it can respond quickly to meet demand. In spring 2016, for example, the company worked with Lord & Taylor to quickly replenish a best-selling blouse that had sold out in days. When the popular off-the-shoulder Isaac Mizrahi blouse sold out quickly, feedback was immediately sent down the supply chain, and blouses were back in stock in six weeks.

Enabling this quick insight into sales data and quick response is the recent implementation of a fully integrated suite of solutions, including PLM, ERP, and SCM from NGC Software.

That quick replenishment at Lord & Taylor? "Previously, that would have taken nine to twelve months," says D'Loren, adding that implementing this type of technology for a department store environment is more challenging than for a vertical retailer such as Zara, which turns inventory five to six times per year. NGC worked closely with Xcel to make tweaks to the process to get things just right, he says. "When you're turning three to four times a year, weekly inventory flow becomes critical."

With design and sourcing able to respond more quickly to understand and meet customer demand, Xcel Brands is helping its retail partners sell more product at full price.

— Jordan K. Speer

Cosabella

Miami, Fla. | www.cosabella.com

NOMINATED BY: Albert | www.albert.ai ■ Mi9 Retail | www.mi9retail.com

It's curious to think that a company that was forward-thinking enough to have a website and use chat rooms to talk to customers in the mid-'90s didn't have a digital marketing program in place in 2013. But that was largely because lingerie brand Cosabella, like many companies that start out as wholesalers, struggled with the advent of direct to consumer, says marketing director Courtney Connell.

Today the family-owned company is making up for lost time by pushing the boundaries of digital innovation. Since Connell joined Cosabella in late 2013 as e-commerce manager, the company has restructured several departments to streamline digital activities and replatformed e-commerce with Upshot Commerce, which was acquired by Mi9 Retail.

After Cosabella's double-digit growth began to slow, the company cut ties with its ad agency. "We were outsourcing every part of our digital program to this agency," explains Connell. "Our in-house team was creating the content but the agency was executing and I was in the middle. It was very inefficient. I saw that the people who knew the brand best weren't doing the campaigns."

Faced with the options of hiring more in-house marketing employees, finding a new agency or exploring marketing automation via artificial intelligence platforms such as Adgorithms' Albert — which had been on Connell's radar for about 18 months — Cosabella opted for AI. Albert tests creative content in seemingly endless combination in search, social and display channels, incorporating his learnings along the way and optimizing ad spend to deliver exponential results.

Implementation took less than a week and, says Connell, Albert



took a few weeks after "ingesting" all of Cosabella's creative to analyze the content and optimize it for new campaigns. Now Cosabella runs one "campaign" per country, so in the United States, for example, Connell will give Albert a budget, tell him who to target (new customers, lookalikes, etc.), and which channels: search, social and display. From there, Albert "takes that broad spectrum and starts to pare it down," explains Connell. At first, the process was terrifying, she adds, with the fear/expectation that Albert was going to waste a lot of money. "But he didn't, and that's pretty cool."

Discovering new audiences means rethinking how to market to them. "Because we've noticed these pockets [of potential customers] that we've ignored, we've changed our content strategy," adds Connell. Now Cosabella works with multiple types of influencers, pairing campaign photos with bloggers' images to show how different types of women are interpreting the brand.

In the first month after launching Albert on Oct. 1, 2016, ad spend dropped 12 percent while return on search and social spend increased by 50 percent. Black Friday and Cyber Monday campaigns doubled the revenue from the year prior. Albert took social media paid ad revenue from between 5 percent and 10 percent to now 30 percent. Conversions coming from Facebook jumped 2,000 percent. Albert has produced significant results on just about every level.

Cosabella also is optimizing its website by using Ascend from Sentient Technologies, another AI provider. Ascend enables the retailer to test different elements of the website, from the promo header ("Made in Italy" vs. "Free Shipping" vs. "Family Owned") to button colors to dropdown menus and photo sizes. The program splits the website traffic between all of the possible combinations and once it understands which candidates for each element are strong, it starts to group them automatically, says Connell. The result:

a 30 percent conversion lift and “a lot of work taken off my plate,” she adds.

The lingerie brand is also experimenting with Sentient’s Aware program, figuring out the workflows. One of the program’s out-of-the-box capabilities is a discovery tool that refines the product assortment displayed to a shopper based on the product photos she clicks on. But the more intriguing idea that Cosabella is working to establish is an interface between Albert and Aware such that Albert can “tell” Aware what kind of ad visitors clicked on

that led them to the site. So if they clicked on an ad featuring a blue bra, then the first product merchandised on the homepage they see should be that bra — a feature Connell describes as a “living landing page,” which no one else is doing. From there, Cosabella would evaluate how to further merchandise the homepage — would similar colors be featured? Or silhouettes? Or maybe something from the same collection?

The goal, says Connell, is to deliver the kind of experience you’d expect in a high-end luxury bou-

tique. The sales associate isn’t going to show you the exact same product she shows to every other customer who comes in; she’s going to tailor the shopping experience to you and your preferences.

Ideally, Cosabella would never have a human being merchandise the website ever again. “We just want to upload product and have everything be automatic from there,” she says. “The whole website should be living, not just the category page.”

— Jessica Binns

PACT Organic Apparel

Boulder, Colo. | www.pactorganic.com

SELF-NOMINATED

Conventional cotton uses about 16 percent of the world’s insecticides and 7 percent of pesticides, and, according to the World Bank, approximately 20 percent of the world’s industrial water pollution comes from the treatment and dyeing of textiles. The apparel and textile industries also struggle with issues related to child labor and poor working conditions.

PACT Organic Apparel is on a mission to change all of that: It’s transforming the way apparel is made by “focusing on the people who make our clothes, and the planet,” says founder and CEO, Brendan Synnott.

Synnott is no stranger to the world of social and environmental responsibility. As the founder of Bear Naked Granola cereal and EVOL Frozen Foods, he has been focused on sustainability for some time. In 2009, drawing from his experience in consumer packaged goods (CPG), Synnott turned his eye to the apparel industry and worked to apply those lessons to clothing.

“People don’t necessarily think of cotton as an agricultural product. We want to communicate that and let people know there are things they can purchase and be proud of,” he says.

With increasing exposure of treacherous working conditions in places around the globe — the collapse of the Rana Plaza factory in Bangladesh in 2013 was a particularly big eye opener — “consumers are starting to pay more attention to how clothing is made, and we want to show there is a more sustainable way to do it,” Synnott says.

“We want consumers to understand that people don’t have to live with pesticides in their communities and



workers don't have to be subjected to unsafe or brutal working conditions." PACT Organic works with fair trade manufacturing facilities in India, and its cotton comes from India as well, via Chetna Organic, a fair trade cotton intervention program that works with small and marginal farmers to grow organic cotton and to help make farming a sustainable and profitable occupation for them.

Synnott says the company's products aren't just good for the planet and workers — they're much softer and they fit better. If the company's growth is any indication, consumers agree. In 2016, PACT Organic hit revenues of about \$15 million to \$20 million at retail, and this year it expects sales to reach \$25 million to \$30 million. The company's best-selling item is its women's leggings, and in the second half of the year the company will

launch baby, toddler and women's and men's lounge/sleep wear. "All of these categories place an emphasis on soft and cozy," says Synnott, "so our super soft cotton should have a great reception."

PACT Organic sells online on its web site (its fastest-growing channel), as well as in retailers such as Target, where it launched last year, and in high-end grocery chains such as Whole Foods, Sprouts and Wegmans. PACT Organic also sells a limited range of its basics on Amazon, which it views as a great channel for introducing the customer to the brand.

"The point of PACT Organic is that you don't have to sacrifice quality and fit to do what's right for people and planet," Synnott concludes.

— Jordan K. Speer

Tailored Brands

Houston, Texas | www.tailoredbrands.com

NOMINATED BY: Kalypso | www.kalypso.com

If there's one overarching legacy that emerges from this market-shaking athleisure movement, it's that consumers want — correction: *demand* — comfort and performance in every area of their lives. It's not enough for your gym shorts alone to offer moisture-wicking and odor protection, now your business suit should, too. You read that correctly: performance fabrics are making their way into a boardroom near you with the advent of The Men's Wearhouse's collaboration with Kenneth Cole Productions, resulting in the AWEAR-TECH AWEARNESS Kenneth Cole line of tailored clothing and sportswear that incorporates 37.5 performance technology. The Men's Wearhouse is a subsidiary of Tailored Brands.

When The Men's Wearhouse first approached 37.5, the vendor's products were designed specifically for the sports and active markets, says Jarrod Nadel, the retailer's chief product development director. "We were very impressed with the performance of their fabrics and their test results were extraordinary," he adds. The challenge, however, was figuring out how to blend the 37.5 fiber with wool

and cotton to create a performance suit and a performance dress shirt — both "firsts" for the industry.

"These two product categories are a large part of our business and we knew if we could achieve this, it would be a game-changer," Nadel says.

The 37.5 fabric technology incorporates active particles that target moisture while it's still vapor, blocking it from becoming the droplets of sweat that cause fabrics to stick to your skin — and to stink. Because 37.5 technology had never before been applied to tailored apparel, The Men's Wearhouse had to engineer the AWEAR-TECH suits from the yarn on up, and even incorporated the 37.5 fiber into the suit linings and mesh components seamlessly, Nadel explains.



The result? Products with a hand "very similar" to the company's 100-percent wool suits and 100-percent cotton dress shirts, says Nadel. "The 37.5 fiber complements the wool and cotton, giving the fabric a resilience along with incredible elasticity and recovery," he adds. What's more, the deep knowledge that both the 37.5 technical team and manufacturing partners brought to

the table enabled The Men's Wearhouse to bring the AWEARNESS line to market quickly and efficiently.

Because educating customers about the benefits of performance fabrics is half the battle, the retailer trained store teams on comprehen-

sive product knowledge around the AWEARNESS line, which has been very well received and "continues to exceed our expectations," notes Nadel.

And in keeping with the trend toward creating products that give

back, a portion of the profits from AWEAR-TECH apparel will benefit Hire Heroes, which helps veterans re-entering the workforce, and Help USA, an organization that fights homelessness.

— Jessica Binns

Talbots

Hingham, Mass. | www.talbots.com

NOMINATED BY: Mad Mobile | www.madmobile.com

There comes a point in time, says Talbots' senior vice president of sales and operations Patrick Walsh, when the GAP-ACT approach to selling — Greet, Approach, Product knowledge, Accessorize, Close, Thank by name — just doesn't quite cut it anymore.

The 454-store chain, which celebrates 70 years as a classic women's heritage brand this year, had fallen onto hard times several years ago, resulting in its \$369-million acquisition by Sycamore Partners. "Our struggles were very public," notes Walsh.

What had worked for a while wasn't working anymore. That transactional approach to selling in store was no longer engaging customers the way it should. Instead, says Walsh, Talbots made the conscious shift to a relationship-based model "to amplify the strength of the brand."

"We know the customer is very social and she'll stop in sometimes just to say hello," explains Walsh. "She has the luxury of time and resources and wants the shopping experience to be a bit more special."

Talbots made that pivot with an "eye toward what a clienteling tool could do for us," adds Walsh. "Technology doesn't ever do anything. People do."

And after considerable preaching and evangelizing the benefits of a clienteling platform to various stakeholders, Walsh and his team selected Mad Mobile's Concierge offering, impressed by its seamless integration with Oracle Relate retail customer engagement (which Talbots was already running as part of its Oracle technology stack, including Xstore POS) and the close-knit co-development effort between the software company and the Talbots crew.

The retailer needed just nine months to move from ideation to implementation. Says Walsh, "we were building the plane as we were flying it." By October 2016, Con-



cierge was live in 60 stores; by March about 300 stores were using the platform, and the full-chain rollout was on track to conclude by the end of April.

Concierge runs on iPad Pros as well as on stores' Windows 10 POS. During testing, 21 store personnel, including associates and managers, evaluated Surface tablets alongside iPads, and all 21 unanimously preferred the Apple device. While enabling Concierge for two different operating systems and ensuring a consistent user experience was less than ideal from an IT standpoint, taking an IT efficiency approach usually doesn't yield the best results in the end, explains Walsh. Instead, he says, the focus should be on user adoption and usability.

In addition to all the standard clienteling features and functions, Talbots wanted Concierge to enrich store employees' productivity, too, and created a homepage for their professional lives — whether associate or manager. The ▶

Concierge homepage displays sales information, benchmarking in a graphic and accessible way how the employee's store is performing against sales targets. It shows the employee's progress through her own incentive program, and links to the rewards page, where she can redeem the points she has earned for travel, merchandise and more.

"The Concierge homepage keeps you close to both the business performance and your own objectives," Walsh says.

What's more, the Concierge homepage includes product knowledge, all the brand buzz about the latest styles such as the spring collection. That's where Talbots incorporates "learn and earn;" by completing learning modules about new products, associates can earn reward points that are credited to their rewards balance in real time.

Next, the homepage features company news, updating associates on any important goings-on. For example, the day before Black Friday, someone in headquarters can record and send out a message company-wide so that the store manager doesn't have to interpret it for staff. It's pushed out straight to individual associates.

Finally, the homepage is where associates receive their email, which includes things such as selling tasks for the day. Suppose it's the day before Black Friday; that selling task might include a list of customers the associate hasn't seen in the past 60 days, so she would build a campaign around those shoppers.

With the Concierge homepage, Talbots has narrowed the list of people who are delivering information and can better track compliance with tasks. In addition, sales performance has increased and associate turnover is at a five-year low, notes Walsh.

Talbots did have to think carefully about how to disrupt its red telephone service, which for decades enabled customers who couldn't find a product in store to dial up the call center and place a catalogue order. "It was a substantial business for us," adds Walsh. Now Concierge "takes the friction out of the experience," enabling the retailer — with a single credit card swipe and single receipt — to complete customer orders involving in-store products as well as items that will be shipped from another location. "We're creating demand, not just fulfilling it, and lifting average order value," Walsh says.

Enabling all of this required "a ton of integration," and was equal parts improving the omnichannel technology and digitizing the associates' black book, explains Walsh.

To further refine its omnichannel operations, Talbots plans to launch Oracle Order Broker by year end, which streamlines orders by locating products closest to the buyer. "This will improve delivery times and reduce operational expenses associated with packing two different items from two different locations," says Walsh.

— Jessica Binns

RushOrderTees

Philadelphia, Pa. | www.rushordertees.com

SELF-NOMINATED

RushOrderTees got its start in 2002, selling screenprinted t-shirts out of a garage. The company's focus was on learning the process from the ground up in order to determine how it could improve the customer experience when ordering custom apparel. Its founders had no idea that their business would transform the industry, says COO Rob Levin. Today, RushOrderTees offers a wide range of customized product to customers from single shirts for individuals to Fortune 500 companies, with some of the fastest turnaround times available anywhere, he says.

"Our mission is to create custom apparel that enables each customer's message to reach a wider, more en-



gaged audience. We work every day to democratize the custom printing process and leverage technology to

make it easy for anyone to promote their cause, community or brand," he says.

Levin says RushOrderTees got its start by being the company that took all of the orders that no other custom-print companies could or would take. These were small orders, or those that required fast turnaround, or had complicated requirements, he says. “The DNA of the business is ‘Just say yes.’”

Since then, he explains, the company has become the “go-to” apparel printer for customers who are looking for not just the fastest time to completion, but also the best quality. In just the past three years, RushOrderTees has filled more than 150,000 orders and printed more than 6 million pieces

of apparel. It has focused on development to perfect its processes, so much so that Mike Nemeroff, founder and CEO, refers to RushOrderTees as “a technology company that happens to produce custom apparel.”

Nemeroff says the company was one of the first in the industry to offer an online design studio, and remains one of the leaders when it comes to enabling a comprehensive mobile experience to customers.

The design studio has been a “constantly evolving labor of love,” says Levin. After years of feedback, testing, and tens of thousands of developer hours, what started as a very

basic Flash application has grown to its current iteration, he explains.

The company has worked diligently to achieve a fine balance in the design studio — easy enough for the average user to be able to create what they want, but powerful enough for graphic artists to get the exacting detail they need. That’s crucial, because its customers range from an individual student creating a single piece for himself, to some of the largest and most demanding customers in the world, says Levin. “Our goal is to make it easy for anyone to make their own custom apparel online.”

— Jordan K. Speer

Nine Line Apparel

Savannah, Ga. | www.ninelineapparel.com

NOMINATED BY: BigCommerce | www.bigcommerce.com

Veteran-owned Nine Line Apparel came to market in 2012 as a new wave of patriotism was beginning to take hold in the United States. The startup launched on the concept of patriotically themed t-shirts has grown into a lifestyle brand offering products as diverse as Made-in-America shot glasses, bottle openers and wooden signs, and supports various charitable organizations (especially wounded veterans group) through its Nine Line Foundation.

As an online-only company, Nine Line Apparel needed a platform that would enable it to scale its business and grow sustainably. To prepare for the future, the startup turned to BigCommerce in 2014 and integrated with third-party providers InStockNotify, Mailchimp, Intuit OnePage Checkout, ShipStation, ShipperHQ, Retention Grid, MailChimp and Unlimited Upsell to expand upon BigCommerce’s native capabilities.

“BigCommerce has some great API connections and apps that allow us to connect our shipping and inventory software directly to the orders generated,” says co-founder and COO Myles Burke, a graduate of Savannah College of Art and Design. “It allows us to not only capture the order on the front side, but also to alleviate some of the pain points of back-end fulfillment and order management.”

The results? Nine Line Apparel increased its revenue nearly 7,000 percent from 2012 to 2015 to \$9.4 million



and another 50 percent year-over-year from 2015 to 2016, thanks in part to its creative use of the BigCommerce platform.

Despite its America-first mission, Nine Line Apparel — like many apparel brands — has found producing garments in the United States to be a challenge.

“As a young company that donates a portion of sales to our nonprofit organization for wounded veterans, keeping cost as minimal as possible has always been key,” notes Burke. “However, we are taking steps towards working with American-made apparel manufacturers to begin transitioning all of our apparel to 100-percent American made.”

Currently, the company makes its hats and hood- ▶

ies in the United States, and with the recent purchase of 300 acres of land for a new Savannah-area headquarters that includes plans for a future cut-and-sew facility, Nine Line Apparel is helping to make reshoring a reality. All apparel is designed and decorated in Savannah.

The 2016 presidential campaign presented Nine Line Apparel with the opportunity to align its brand with the Make America Great Again movement. “We looked

at our average consumer, analyzed customer behavior and feedback, and determined the key demographics that we were missing,” explains Burke. “We focused on not only what our existing customers wanted, but also worked to improve the exposure of our brand to like-minded customers that we hadn’t yet reached.”

By year’s end, Nine Line Apparel plans to roll out several campaigns aimed at rewarding customers.

— Jessica Binns

Hyperlite Mountain Gear

Biddeford, Maine | www.hyperlitemountaingear.com

SELF-NOMINATED



The core of the backstory for Hyperlite Mountain Gear is not unlike that of many other business launches: dissatisfaction. Founder Mike St. Pierre couldn’t find the type of good, durable, lightweight, design-driven gear for his outdoor pursuits that he wanted, so he decided to make it himself. He schooled himself in fabrics, technologies and production processes, and then started building the exact minimalist gear he needed. In the eight years since, with the help of a global team of adventurer ambassadors, the company

has continued to refine its gear to help users increase their speed, distance and efficiency by achieving an ideal balance of strength, weight and performance in its products — and demand has continued to grow, says director of operations John Schafer.

Hyperlite — as committed to its Made-in-the-USA production (or, to be even more specific, its Made-in-Maine production) as to its ultralightweight philosophy — occupies a space in the one-million-square-foot historic Biddeford Mills facility, a converted textile mill in Bid-

deford, Maine, that has drawn an eclectic group of artisans and small businesses together into a “very cool community.”

The company runs an intense production “training cell” that is necessary both because of the specialized techniques required to manufacture with its lightweight Dyneema® fabrics and also because of the lack of trained sewers in the area. “We’ve lost a whole generation of machine operators,” say Schafer. Even so, demand for its products has increased so rapidly that Hyperlite knew it could not keep up via staffing additions alone.

“With growth nearly doubling each year, we knew that we needed to deploy the best engineering and systems available to meet demand and cost-effectively produce here in the USA,” says Schafer. That need led Hyperlite to make some changes, first improving the layout of its production floor and then implementing the Shopfloor Eye™ real-time shop-floor control solution. After just three months, Hyperlite could see measurable gains in process visibility and control, leading to greater throughput.

The Shopfloor solution has been so successful that the company is now in the process of rolling it out across all of its operations, beyond just packs.

This has brought greater efficiency and confidence to the team, which Schafer—who's come out of retirement twice—proudly describes as the most diverse and dynamic he's ever worked with in his more than 40 years in manufacturing.

"Building [the product] here is critical to the rebuilding of our community and to bringing back

our middle class," he says. Now at 46 employees, the company is "growing exponentially," says Schafer. "We're seeing our packs in use all around the world. Our product is everywhere, from all the major long-distance hiking trails to Mt. Everest. I have even seen photos of our packs on the back of a yak in Nepal." And as of this writing,

founder St. Pierre was finishing the last section of a 700-mile hike below the rim of the Grand Canyon, which Schafer says is such a rare feat that more people have walked on the moon.

No Hyperlite packs have been seen in orbit yet, but the company is just getting started.

—Jordan K. Speer

Superior Glove

Acton, Ontario, Canada | www.superiorglove.com

NOMINATED BY: Simparel | www.simparel.com

What do Honda, Toyota, NASA and Whole Foods have in common? They're all customers of Superior Glove, the provider of protective, cut-resistant work gloves and other goods founded in 1910. Created on the premise that companies should protect "the most important commodity there is"—hard-working men and women—Superior Glove has weathered continuous change in the apparel manufacturing industry and remained a global go-to source of industrial work wear.

With the "lion's share" of the Canadian work glove business locked up, the company has been seeing robust growth in the United States over the past five years, and products including its high-quality premium leather goods in addition to its best-known Canadian-made cut-resistant gloves are among the items driving the business. The company operates four manufacturing facilities, including three in Canada that produce 5 million pairs of gloves annually and an overseas joint venture plant.

Faced with new operational challenges as its business expanded, Superior Glove sought out a business platform that could meet its current and future needs—and found its solution in Simparel Enterprise. The comprehensive platform, purpose built for the needs of apparel companies, eliminates numerous outdated and unwieldy, customized systems—some of which were no longer supported by the vendor, according to marketing and communications manager Julie McFater.

"Crafted specifically with businesses like ours in mind, this computer system will revolutionize the way that we report on, input, access and view data about all of our products," says senior project manager/business analyst/IT manager Rhonda Bentley.

The implementation began in September 2016, and in December, key stakeholders participated in the first pilot. "We were able to see and review all the steps in



our new computer system from placing an order to payment," Bentley adds. With Simparel, the company will greatly reduce the amount of work that is duplicated while increasing transparency and visibility across the enterprise. What's more, centralized data will help to drive better-informed business decisions.

Superior Glove aims to go fully live with phase one of the implementation by July, and phase two, integrating the PLM and shop floor functionalities, is scheduled to begin in September, notes Bentley. The Simparel deployment eventually will touch virtually every area of the business, including sampling, purchasing, manufacturing, quality assurance, distribution, customer service, financial and marketing.

—Jessica Binns

Timberland

Stratham, N.H. | www.timberland.com

SELF-NOMINATED

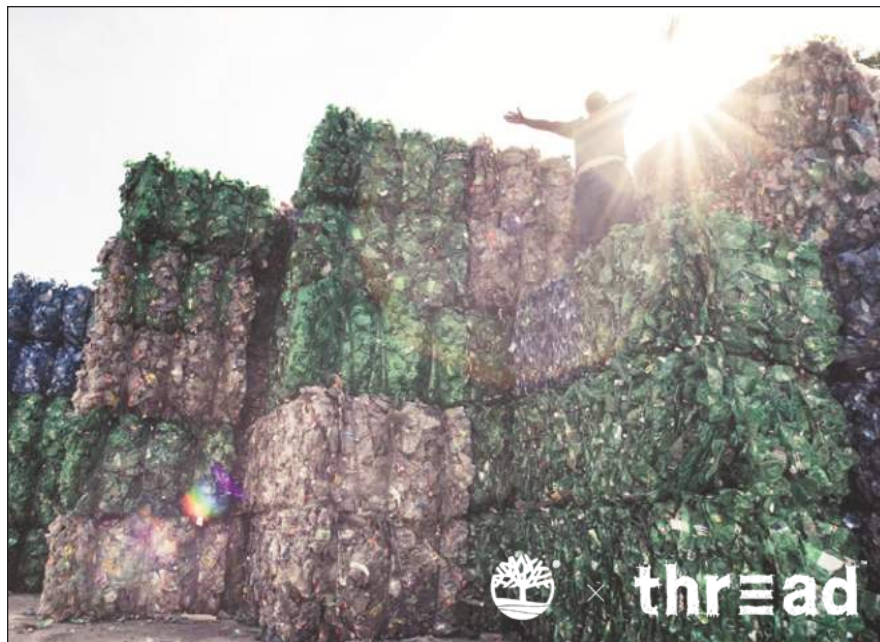
Answer: It has resulted in 765,280 plastic bottles recycled, 30,521,203 gallons of water saved, 15,305 pounds of pesticide not used, 77 income opportunities created in Haiti, \$2,295 in revenue generated for Haitian bottle collectors and collection centers and \$14,540 in revenue generated for Haitian recyclers.

The question: What is the result of Timberland's new partnership with Thread B?

At a time of rising awareness and concern among consumers about environmental stewardship and social justice, Timberland has hit the ball out of the park with an innovative partnership that is fostering a healthier community in Haiti by both cleaning up the outdoors and providing income to many of its residents.

Timberland has a long history of caring for the environment and working to create products using recycled, organic or renewable (ROR) materials. Since 2009, the company has given the equivalent of 233 million plastic water bottles new life in footwear. In 2015 alone, the brand used one million pounds of recycled PET — the equivalent of 47 million plastic water bottles — in Timberland footwear.

Striving to take its use of ROR materials up a notch, Timberland recently partnered with Thread, a



B Corporation that takes trash from the streets of the developing world and converts it into fabric — and also dignified jobs — which it then sells to companies that value environmental and social justice, says Colleen Vien, director of sustainability for Timberland. Thread's Ground to Good™ fabric isn't just about the environment; it's also about improving the lives of citizens in various regions around the world.

This spring, Timberland unveiled a collection developed with Thread fabric that was created by harvesting plastic bottles littering the streets and landfills of Haiti, said Vien. Timberland is the first major brand to launch a collection with Thread, for which it purchased 76,528 yards of Thread fabric (vs. 100 percent conventional cotton).

How does the process work, specifically? In Haiti, more than 1,300 local residents collect the plastic bottles that are developed into Thread fabric. The collectors sell the bottles

to 50 Haitian-owned and operated collections centers, which then sell the sorted plastic to Haiti Recycling and Environmental Cleaning Solutions S.A. in Port-au-Prince.

There, the production line washes and shreds the bottles into raw material called “flake,” which is then sent to U.S.-based factories that melt and shape the flake into a fiber that is woven into fabric. Timberland purchases the high-quality fabric and uses it to create durable bags and boots, culminating in the Thread X Timberland Collection.

Each yard of Thread fabric is tracked at every step of its journey, providing transparency not only to all companies along the supply chain, but also to the consumer, who can tap into the stories and metrics behind each product that they purchase, explains Vien. This allows them to understand how they “are making a positive difference in other peoples' lives,” she concludes.

— Jordan K. Speer