

Weighing Tech's Place in Fashion

By WWD STAFF

THE WORLDS OF FASHION and technology continue to collide — with the stylish embracing the use of 3-D printers and other, once-unimagined tools and the tech set growing more design-savvy by the minute.

Just how far the two sides have come — and just how deeply technology is changing the apparel and accessories trade — was in focus at the Fashion Tech Forum, hosted by Karen Harvey Consulting Group in Manhattan.

Pamela Love, who was reluctant to use any 3-D technology and considered it “soulless,” described how she came full circle, tried out the technology and is now a convert.

Then there were representatives from Gap Inc. who discussed how the fashion giant is learning to transcend “big company structures” and think smaller, for instance, by setting up an internal social platform used during the design process.

And technology is also changing who is in the industry. Nike's chief talent scout said tech people are becoming more creative and design-focused, with a chief digital officer bringing together “the left and right brains.”

Here, highlights from the forum:

BALANCING TECH AND DESIGN

Constance White moderated a panel called “A Designer's Point of View,” featuring Pamela Love, Adam Lippes and Tiffany & Co. design director Francesca Amfitheatrof.

Although aware of the importance of technology, the trio made a case for a measured approach when it comes to design. “There have been a lot of changes in the way I design now,” Love said. “I was reluctant to adopt all of 3-D technology. I thought it was soulless.” But upon discovering programs such as ZBrush and Sculptris, she realized there are ways to create designs “that felt organic and handmade, on the computer in 3-D.”

“It increased how quickly I was able to develop a design taken from a sketch, or a thought in my head,” Love added.

Amfitheatrof noted, “We produce some very large quantities of jewelry and we use 3-D printers to help us very quickly understand proportions and volume, but we always start with sketching. I think it's very important that technology doesn't take over the creative.”

Lippes, who started his line in contemporary but recently relaunched at the designer tier, concurred. “We used a lot of technology [at the contemporary level], and I felt it was limiting the intimacy you have with the product,” he said. “When we relaunched in the designer luxury, we went back to no-technology design.”

NURTURING TALENT AT GAP

Gap Inc. strives to attract talent and spur creativity by “being big, but acting small.” That was the topic of a discussion on building a better workplace with Gap's global marketing officer Seth Farberman and Gap executive vice president and creative director Rebekka Bay, moderated by Christene Barberich, editor in chief at Refinery29.

Talent nurturing tactics at Gap were brought to light by Farberman and Bay, who said the company creates a “boutique” atmosphere by colocating creative and marketing managers to share common spaces and “create an atmosphere of trust.” As Bay said, “We started to physically tear down walls and reset work spaces that we co-share to work creatively. It's like going back to design school and having more of a blank canvas to start to create.” Farberman also noted that fewer meetings are being conducted and that there's “more actual doing.... Meetings are the worst thing ever.”

The executives also said that Chatter, an internal social platform for better communications, was rolled out, and that



Christene Barberich, Rebekka Bay and Seth Farberman.

throughout the design process teams are encouraged to constantly stay connected. In addition, the company adheres to the Results Only Work Environment, or ROWE, management system, originally pioneered at Best Buy, which bases executive compensation on results rather than hours put in.

“Big company structures often get in the way,” said Farberman. “You can overcome it by behaving in a way that's personalized and small.”

Asked what she looks for in hiring talent, Bay said, “Someone that scares me a little bit, who is a much better designer

by 2020, this demographic has changed the way consumers shop, entertain themselves and communicate. Gutfreund said 52 percent of the world's population is under the age of 30. She noted that the Millennials are “the most misunderstood generation that's ever existed,” citing adjectives such as “entitled,” “selfish” and “impatient.” Surveys have shown that 25 percent of them feel like older generations don't understand them.

Gutfreund said Millennials just want to be heard.

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— SETH FARBMAN, GAP INC.

than I am. Someone who can pitch to me.” She also seeks those “wanting to be part of a team — that modern designer who wants to be collaborative.”

“Curiosity is first,” Farberman said, explaining his criteria for tapping talent. “It's an attitude, a desire to make a mark.” Farberman also cited a willingness to be inventive. “You have to give the right people the chance to express themselves.”

UNDERSTANDING MILLENNIALS

As Jamie Gutfreund, chief marketing officer of Noise/The Intelligence Group, got up to the podium, she asked for a show of hands of those between the ages of 18 and 34. “We don't understand you,” she said. “The truth is we're just jealous of you.”

With two billion Millennials globally and an estimated buying power of \$2.5 trillion

They want to have a say and want to be part of the process,” she said. If Millennial consumers buy a Michael Kors bag, for example, they want everyone to know they bought the bag and want to be treated like shareholders in the company. They want the company to “communicate like you care about me.”

FOUNDER STORIES

A panel featuring three tech firm founders: Michael Preysman of Everlane, Tim Weingarten of The Hunt and Katrina Lake of Stitch Fix, and moderated by Alisa Gould-Simon, chief executive officer and cofounder of Pose, discussed the outsider's view.

Asked about the challenges presented by starting a business without being from the fashion world, each had a different take.



"For us, it was a matter of creating awareness," Weingarten said, "Convincing people that the problem they have, the frustration they have, which was seeing something and saying 'I love that where can I find that?' That will be solved on The Hunt."

Preysman said while Everlane is a much more traditional design company, "It was actually quite complicated. We screwed a lot up in the beginning."

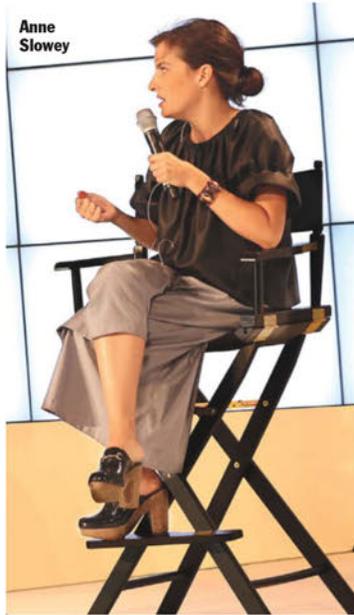
"To find factories, we LinkedIn people and we became friends," he added. "Slowly following through this wave of people, we ended up with a team."

Lake noted: "I think there are some advantages to coming to the space with fresh eyes. I think not knowing what inventory meant...a lot of the things we approached, we were able to use technology in interesting ways because I just didn't know any better."

COMEY AND THE CATS

Rachel Comey knows the power of cats. Elle's fashion news director Anne Slowey chose to focus on Comey's Web site — specifically the ongoing live-stream of adoptable kittens. "I didn't have a Web site for so long, and I was trying to figure out what the site was going to be like," said Comey. "We decided on our homepage to be a live-stream that's a video in our office and we just point it at different stuff. At first, it was a cornucopia inspired by a Dutch painting we made in real time, and it was fruit and flowers and it kind of rotted. People couldn't even tell it was live and by two weeks later, you see flies buzzing, and rotten fruit was disgusting — but awesome, because it was so slow....[Then] someone in my studio found some kittens that needed adopting, so we put the kittens up there."

Slowey went on to praise the designer's knack for staying ahead of the curve — whether it be a trend (Slowey credited Comey for being the first to show pajama pants); a location (Comey has shown her runway collections in Brooklyn for the last two seasons), or with the latest technology. "In our stores, there is no cash register," said Comey. "We just swipe from the dressing room. And we're working on something new...."



FINDING THE RIGHT TALENT FIT

In a world where fashion and technology intersect, different talents are being sought out.

Michael Leming, chief talent scout at Nike; Paul Murphy, chief executive officer of Dots and a partner in Betaworks, and Karen Harvey, founder, Fashion Tech Forum and ceo of Karen Harvey Consulting Group, offered their opinions of what's required of today's executives who work in the tech and fashion sectors. The panel, titled "Talent Acquisition: The New Art and Science," was moderated by Alina Cho, editor at large at Random House.

According to Leming, the first part of your career, you're concerned about making money, but in the second part, you align yourself with things that are important to you. "When you align with the morals and values of where you work, it's great," he said. Murphy said Dots, a con-

nect-the-dots game app, will be doubling its work force in the next year, and he seeks people who may have unusual interests but are also good at certain functions.

Harvey said she and her team will search for candidates all over the world; they'll look at product; they'll attend Art Basel, where creative talent is, and will look for the right cultural fit. "We work with people who appreciate design and want to up their game," said Harvey. She added that today's leaders need to have the human connection on one hand, and the right skill sets on the other.

Noting that an overwhelming majority of young people want to work from home and be entrepreneurs, Cho asked the panelists how they attract young people to their company. Murphy replied: "We're very successful in attracting people who want to build something. We like to think we can build our company to a Pixar. We work long hours and weekends."

Discussing what today's chief digital officer looks like, Leming said, "We did

brand, Farryn Weiner, explained that Kors looks at the world from an omnichannel viewpoint. Consumers no longer see the line between digital initiatives that live on social media or in-store. "They are seeing one brand, and the powerful brands are sending a clear and strong message to all of those touch points," Weiner said. Pau Sabria, co-founder of Olapic, thinks user-generated content is the future for brands. His firm helps brands leverage user-generated content to see 7 to 9 percent increases in sales. "If people expect user-generated content to be more prominent, it will get larger. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy," Sabria said.

R&D IN THE WORLD OF WEARABLES

Maddy Maxey, chief technology officer and cofounder of Crated — a research and development lab — believes that the "sweet spot" in the wearable space is one that combines technology and aestheticism. "Where does innovation happen?" Maxey asked the audience during her

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— JAMIE GUTFREUND, NOISE/THE INTELLIGENCE GROUP

our cdo search. We wanted him to be cool. The list is long....Tech people are becoming more creative and design-focused," he said. He added that a chief digital officer would be "a morphing of the left and right brains coming together."

UNMASKING THE DIGITAL CONSUMER

Rob LoCascio, chief executive officer of online marketing and Web analytics firm LivePerson, moderated a panel that explored what innovations brands are using to engage their consumers. Healey Cypher, head of retail innovation at eBay, said the goal is to infuse the best of online technology into the physical world. Ebay is working to "rehumanize" commerce through technology, and as a result make it invisible so the consumer doesn't even realize it's there.

At Michael Kors, senior director, global creative and digital communications at the

presentation. "Design meets math and science meets tech: That's where we find all sorts of new and interesting technologies coming out. They are combining design talent with business."

Among the areas that the firm specializes in are "smart" textiles, life-cycle design, garment design, physical computing, parametric design, ideation, branding, circuitry, 3-D modeling and custom research and development. Maxey pointed out that textile engineering is the next generation of wearables, with clothing that is outfitted with natural-feeling sensors.

THINGS TO KNOW TO HAVE AN EFFECTIVE BRAND IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Presented by Quynh Mai, founder of agency Moving Image & Content

1. Always-on marketing. Be where your consumer is, at all times.
2. Cut through the clutter of traditional marketing with guerrilla tactics.
3. People trust people, not corporations.
4. Earn your media: the power of word of mouth.
5. Engage people in the creative process and build a connection.
6. For content to be seen, have a strong, well-thought-out distribution plan.
7. New media that is less produced and more "street style" feels more authentic. #NoFilter.
8. Fashion films = commercials. People don't like commercials.
9. Millennials are dictating trends, pop culture and social conversations.
10. Gain insight into what people want to consume and what you want to market.
- Bonus 11. Think of 3s: short, sweet and snackable.

Alina Cho, Karen Harvey, Paul Murphy and Michael Leming.



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FOUNDERS OF THE FUTURE CHALLENGE

A host of judges — including Sophia Amoroso, founder and chief executive officer of Nasty Gal; Rebekka Bay, Gap's executive vice president and creative director; David Tisch, Box Group's managing director; Lew Frankfort, Coach's executive chairman, and Wanda Gierhart, Neiman Marcus' chief marketing officer — named Rank & Style the winner of the Founders of the Future Challenge, a contest for tech startups. In addition to receiving \$50,000 — the company, which produces data-driven top 10 lists for the fashion and beauty industries — will also see six months of mentorship. The contest, moderated by Joe Zee, editor in chief and executive creative officer at Yahoo Fashion, was a partnership between Elle and Karen Harvey Consulting Group. The other two companies to present were Just, a Web site that looks to show transparency in the fashion supply chain, and Cosmic Cart, a tool that allows consumers to purchase content directly from content without leaving the site.