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TIMEOUT | MARK SULLIVAN

Why We Buy & Why We Don't

IN 1999, PACO UNDERHILL WROTE THE BEST-SELLING BUSINESS BOOK "WHY WE BUY," which was deemed the first scientific study of shopping. I am writing a book about the current state of shopping. It will be called "Why We Don't Buy."

In the sales process, you must understand the objections to overcome them. Here are the objections, the reasons consumers are not buying right now. They are overwhelmed and overstimulated. They are angry, they are nervous and most of all they are uncertain.

If you are certain, you can usually deal with just about anything. Uncertainty leads to inaction and that's what we are seeing now, especially as it relates to fashion product.

**Anything
retailers can
do to "show
the love" is a
step toward
getting the
customer
IN THE
MOOD.**

Shoppers right now are buying two things: cars and electronics. These are logical, need-based purchases. Of course, there is some emotion to buying a car that can go fast or protect your family. And phones and tablets can be fun, but these are "cool-headed" purchases that are very different than the emotional triggers that drive most foot-wear and apparel buying.

I have long believed that most research on why consumers buy misses the point. These studies probe shoppers' attitudes about price, materials, where the product was made and endorsements. Why did the shoppers buy it? Because it made them feel good.

And the reason shoppers are not buying today? They can't feel good about forking over \$150 for a new clog, sandal or casual sneaker. Our consumer is experiencing a

crisis of confidence, not in themselves but in everything around them: their government, the media, their employers.

So what can retailers do about this? First of all, it's not productive to counter an emotional argument with a logical response. The consumer's failure to buy today is an emotional argument, not a logical one. And reacting logically with discounts, e-mail campaigns and the like is not going to shake the shoppers out of inaction. Today's shopper is in need of a hug; in fact, they need lots of them.

Anything retailers can do to "show the love" is a step toward getting the customer "in the mood."

From the moment a consumer wakes up in the morning, he or she is bombarded with stimuli. Alarm clock goes off and serenades the shopper with a few radio ads. That is followed by a dose of morning TV, maybe a peek at a newspaper or an online source of information and then a commute that may feature additional radio ads or a ride on public transportation that offers up even more stimuli.

Shopping has always been a social experience — something to share with friends. Internet shopping is a solitary activity. There's no social aspect, no lunch with friends afterwards. It's joyless, logical, not emotional.

To shake today's consumer out of this trance, stores need to hit those emotional triggers that make people buy. Underhill's book was a scientific examination of why people buy. Today's book on motivating shoppers needs to be a love story. ●

Mark



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TECHNOLOGY

Altra's New Smart Shoe



The first-ever Altra “smart” shoe hits retail shelves this fall.

There’s a new smart shoe in town and it’s looking to put the beat down on what inventors are calling “the bull crap of marketing” that consumers have been fed over the last 40 years, while at the same time elevating app-based personal coaching along with performance and injury prevention for runners of all kinds.

The first-ever Altra smart shoe, the Altra IQ, will be hitting retail shelves this fall in about half to two-thirds of the brand’s 2000 doors in 50 states and 46 countries worldwide.

“This is a coach that comes with you in your biggest time of need,” explains Altra co-founder and Altra IQ inventor Golden Harper from his Logan, UT, office. The brand was born in 2011 and has been recognized for its meteoric rise as the fastest growing shoe brand in history.

That “coach” is a blend of shoe design and proprietary technologies, powered by parent company ICON Health & Fitness’ iFit app and a thin multi-sensor system embedded in the midsole of each shoe.

The sensor – technology that ICON licenses to other footwear makers in fact – sends real time data wirelessly to the app or iFit tracker watch, which then delivers individual analysis and real-time voice coaching tips through Bluetooth ear buds. “Pick your knees up,” “Get that cadence up,” or “Run proud” are some of the helpful hints runners will receive from about 70 carefully curated corrections, derived from Harper’s more than two decades of coaching experience and research, his own background as an exercise scientist and ultra-runner, and existing data on running and injuries.

It’s a natural transition for Altra, says Harper, not only because ICON already owned the technology and is constantly pioneering this

type of virtual coaching through its treadmill and stationary bicycle platforms, but because, “I always had this saying, that an Altra shoe is like a running technique coach that comes in a box.”

But Altra shoes didn’t always come from a box. They started as “hacked up” Franken-shoes that Harper and his dad were making with power tools and toaster ovens in their garage in central Utah, in an impassioned effort to help the customers of their small running shop prevent injuries, various forms of which plague 80 percent of runners each year, he says.

To derive the data and make the coaching recommendations, multiple sensors in each shoe, from heel to forefoot, record a runner’s technique and form through four metrics: landing zone (foot strike), cadence, impact rate and ground contact time. Individual recommendations for improving running form will be both visible and audible via smartphone, and visible on an iFit GPS watch, sold separately. Users can also collect data through the sensors without carrying a phone or watch during the run.

“This is about getting the marketing shifted away from things that are bull crap and getting people focused on their running technique, like cadence, and things we can draw positive conclusions from,” Harper says of the new technology. “Which frankly is what we’ve been trying to do with our non-IQ shoes anyway. Our technology from the beginning has always been about realignment, running technique, natural foot and body positioning, in order to prevent injuries.”

The Altra IQ shoe powered by iFit is built on the same last as Altra’s new Impulse shoe, with an MSRP of \$199.99 at 8.6 ounces. Altra is offering guaranteed replacement if the sensor system fails before the life of the shoe.

— By Aaron H. Bible



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RETAIL

Eneslow Educates the Doctors



Dr. Nick Pagano, one of Spenco's resident podiatrists, gives a history of the nearly 50-year-old Spenco Medical Company.

Spenco and Eneslow recently collaborated on a series of professional Medical Nights to educate New York City podiatrists on the benefits of specific types of insoles. The events were designed to educate members of the medical community on new options for patients with foot problems. About 15 podiatrists and a few assistants attended the catered events, where they received a tour of the Eneslow stores and custom orthotics production room. Dr. Nick Pagano, one of Spenco's resident podiatrists, gave a history of the nearly 50-year-old Spenco Medical Company. He demonstrated the features of the company's flagship Total Support Insole, as well as other specific types of insoles, including the new Spenco Medics Diabetic insole. "The benefit of events like this is exposing doctors to new and different products that may help

their patients," said Spenco product manager Brian Mangione. "Not everyone needs custom orthotics, and podiatrists can help those patients more quickly and affordably with other options. If they don't carry them directly, they can recommend Eneslow to get fitted for Spenco products to address different needs."

Each doctor received a complimentary pair of Spenco footwear. Eneslow was founded in 2009 and its team includes 12 board certified pedorthists, all trained by Eneslow Pedorthic Institute (EPI) faculty. Earlier this summer, Implus, the North Carolina conglomerate known for its Sof Sole insole line, acquired the Spenco insole and 2nd Skin medical adhesive assets of Spenco Medical Corporation. The Spenco portfolio of insole assets includes the Total Support, Spenco RX and Polysorb brands. The acquisition provides Implus with a second major insole line to sell to retailers in the competitive footbed marketplace. ●

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NEW PRODUCT



Superfeet's Super Shoes

The insole maker is rolling out its first shoe collection.

With the tongue-in-cheek positioning that “nobody needs another footwear company,” insole maker Superfeet has rolled out its first shoe collection featuring a line of casual shoes and sandals. Superfeet is telling a technical story with the shoes, saying its developers understand foot shape and support as well as anyone. The shoes are built on a “Supercork” premium insole and strobel board, which is then married to the midsole to achieve what the company says is superior fit. The uppers are made from premium leathers and mesh. The initial collection includes six sandals and 12 shoe designs for men and women. Last year, Superfeet introduced the Outside sandal, a casual comfort flip-flop, but this rollout represents a full-fledged effort on the shoe category. The brand is targeting its current retail base with the products, including run specialty. The shoes range in retail price from \$60 to \$140. ●

TREND RIGHT

Chaco Ramping Up Growth



Chaco is counting on its strength with young outdoor consumers.

Chaco is growing fast and brand president Seth Cobb, who took over the role almost eight months ago, says geographic expansion as well as a core strength with young outdoor consumers will fuel the brand through 2016 and into the future.

Wolverine World Wide CEO Blake Krueger described Chaco as “growing like a weed” in the company’s Q1 earnings call in May, and with good reason: “Really, really, really strong double-digit growth” has led the brand to quadruple its sales since Wolverine picked it up in 2009, when sales were under \$20 million.

“Right now, [Chaco] seems to be on the same growth path as Merrell was in the early years,” Krueger told analysts. “The brand has probably the highest margin of any wholesale brand in our portfolio.”

Cobb tells *Footwear Insight* that being trend-right, especially for young consumers, is driving that.

“Research tells us that Chaco’s core consumer is between 18-24 years old. We’re really connecting with college kids, which is helping to create energy with consumers of all ages,” he says. “Many brands in our industry speak of Millennials as if they are these mythical creatures that always seem just out of reach, [but] Chaco is fortunate to have formed really meaningful

connections with these younger consumers and we’re proud to be a part of their lives and culture.”

Keeping the brand top-of-mind for the college-age consumer means bumping up the spend on in-store activations as well as in the Chaco Tour, which gives the brand a footprint at music and sport festivals. And social media is key, Cobb says.

“We have aggressive goals for followers and engagement on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and now Snapchat,” he says. “We know that when we drive awareness and engagement with younger consumers through these channels, the rest takes care of itself.”

More awareness should drive sales in areas outside the South, Chaco’s strongest region. Cobb says the brand has made strides in the Northeast and Upper Midwest and thinks that global expansion, especially in Asia-Pacific, has potential.

And the continued prominence of athleisure is an asset.

“While outdoor has been gravitating towards the lifestyle side of the spectrum for some time, it’s hard not to notice an acceleration of this trend in 2016,” Cobb says. “Chaco products deliver on our performance promise every time, but they transition seamlessly into the less active parts of our consumers lives. We’re positioned well for this development.”

— By Jennifer Ernst Beaudry



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Timberland will roll out “modernized” assortments for men and women in Spring 2017 that tap into the brand’s heritage from its iconic Original Yellow Boot that offer versatility, fashion-forwardness via up-

pers with fabric combinations, color and, in some instances, the comfort of an athletic shoe from a SensorFlex outsole. “The timing is right for us due to the strength of our brand behind boots,” says Jennifer DiBello, senior merchandise manager North America for the VF Corp.-owned company. “When consumers see a boot that is modern, it is accepted.”

On the men’s side, the Chukka silhouette, offering versatility from day to night and playing into the outdoor lifestyle trend, will take center stage through a number of styles. The Killington, for example, blends crafted leather with mesh in the upper on a SensorFlex bottom.

The Kenniston (\$140 MSRP) for women takes the DNA of the brand’s 6-inch boot and contemporizes it through a white SensorFlex outsole made of 34 percent recycled rubber, a premium leather upper and an overall sport-inspired look.

DiBello describes Timberland’s typical female customer as someone who wants a “sexy tough look, not demure quiet” through chunkier, thicker outsoles and bigger ornamentations.

Timberland’s ongoing use of leather and making its footwear weather-ready remains vitally important to the brand as is its mission to make all styles fashionable and versatile. Color-wise, consumers can expect to see subtle

TRENDS

Boots for All Seasons

Timberland Kenniston, MSRP \$140.



and toned-down offerings, away from the bolds of seasons past, to keep in step with trends in the ready-to-wear market. These include uppers in soft greys, a “well-traveled white” and “croissant” in the first quarter.

By the second quarter of 2017, Timberland will turn to shades that “pop” such as Tandoori

Spice and Mykonos Blue as it draws on a macro trend — Cuba’s influence on color palettes.

By Fall ’17, the brand will begin calling in incorporating hiking’s influence into its footwear offerings, a trend already visible at the couture level, through such elements as D-rings on the upper. — *By Bob McGee*

TRAIL SHOES

Lightweight Updates from Inov-8

Inov-8 is updating its award-winning Roclite multi-terrain line of footwear with five new models ranging from a fast and light version to a mid-cut Gore-Tex boot, the lightest of its kind.



The Roclite 305 GTX (above) and Roclite 290 (below) are two of five new Roclite styles from Inov-8.



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VERSATILE

Streamlined Style from Oboz

New from Oboz for Spring 2017: Women's Equinox (right) and Crest Low BDry (below).



Versatility is the name of the game in Spring 2017 offerings from Oboz.

For hikers, the brand's Crest Low BDry (\$150) and Crest Mid BDry (MSRP \$165) aim to deliver technical, light, waterproof footwear for quick adventures or long miles. The Crest styles feature a breathable BDry membrane. Underneath, waterproof double strobil construction gives the shoe a light, flexible feel. Underneath the heel, a polyurethane plug gives resilient cushioning. Extras include speed lacing, an engineered BFit Deluxe footbed that supports the arches, and toe and heel reinforcements.

With its streamlined outsole and women's-specific last design, the Oboz Equinox (\$110) offers a nimble solution for done-in-a-day adventures. Inside, the engineered BFit Deluxe insole cushions and supports the arches of the foot. Outside, an ultra-breathable mesh upper has protective Nubuck leather overlays that give structure to the midfoot and also fend off abrasion. Finishing touches include a heel pull, toe and heel overlays for durability, a comfortable padded collar and, at the heel, a stylized bitterroot, the state flower of Montana.

Built with ample Nubuck leather, the Women's Mesa Low BDry (\$140) offers support in a fully waterproof shoe. Textile over the toe and in the tongue help with ventilation, and toe, heel and midfoot guards add durability. The Mesa is constructed on Oboz' women's-specific Madison outsole and midsole, which has a narrower footprint, and a refined profile that delivers plenty of traction. Like all Oboz footwear, a high quality supportive BFit Deluxe insole is included. One color.

The Ocoee (\$55) sling has soft webbing that crisscrosses the foot and wraps the big toe for a comfortable hold. Sure footing is offered via full-coverage, carbon rubber Headwaters outsole, which has small lugs. The footbed is cushioned EVA, with an engineered shape that supports the arches and cradles the heel, just like the BFit Deluxe footbed Oboz includes in its hiking boots and shoes. ●

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PRODUCT LAUNCH

Arc'teryx Is Off and Running

The crowded trail shoe market is getting a new player. Canadian outdoor brand Arc'teryx is introducing its first trail running shoe, the Norvan VT, and the shoe has a definite "point of view."

"We believe in a minimalistic approach with construction, material usage and cushion without sacrificing comfort, support, or durability," says Greg Grenzke, design manager, Ascent and footwear, Arc'Teryx.

Building on Arc'teryx's growing selection of footwear offerings, the Norvan VT is designed to allow trail runners to adapt to varied terrain. It features a simple, adjustable lacing system. The shoe's patent-pending 360-degree support system is made of internal and external components and allows the shoe to be easily tightened and secured for a supportive fit.

The MSRP is \$170 (\$200 for the GTX version). ●

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Selling the Soles

How Retailers Can Get More Orthotics into Shoes.

By Nancy Ruhling

Customers usually don't ask for insoles. They come into the store mainly to buy a pair of shoes. This is more than a hard fact. It's also evidence of a great opportunity. There is business to be had for retailers who are able to step in and save not only feet but also sales figures.

So how can retailers seal the deal? We asked Mike Baker, CEO of Sole; Len Chatwin, Spenco Running specialty sales director; Drew Davies, Sof Sole senior director and national sales manager; Matt Gooch, Superfeet research and education manager; Matt Schwartz, executive VP of Aetrex Worldwide; and Steve Sheridan, Hickory Brands senior VP, to tell us how to play – and win – the game.

What are your top tips to footwear retailers for selling insoles?

Baker: The number one thing to do is to simply introduce the product. Bring out the footbed as part of the fitting process alongside the shoe and start the dialogue about how a footbed could benefit the customer. Simply give the consumer the opportunity to consider the purchase.

Schwartz: Most footwear comes with a footbed made of very basic, inexpensive materials. And in all cases, the footbed that comes with the shoe is generic, that is, the same for all foot types. Aftermarket insoles provide the consumer with the opportunity to upgrade the fit and feel of the footwear

“You have to know your product. When you do, you become a consultant versus a salesperson. You explain why the customer needs the product instead of making a sales pitch. You create trust.”

Steve Sheridan, Hickory Brands

inside. In the case of Aetrex orthotics, we take this one step further. Our technology analyzes the customer's feet and in a matter of seconds custom selects the right orthotic for her unique feet. We offer customers a personalized fit and thereby enhance the comfort and function of the footwear. The key is that the sales associate offers the customer the option of the upgrade inside the shoe. Retailers need to teach their sales associates to offer all customers the option to upgrade and personalize the fit of their footwear inside. When they do this, they sell tons of orthotics.

Gooch: There are seven rules of the foot. 1. Utilize insoles as a tool in the fit process to maximize consumer experience by helping to personalize the fit and feel of their footwear. 2. Introduce the idea of an insole early in the fit process using benefits-focused language to drive the conversation. 3. Use the information from the fit process to provide personalized recommendations for each consumer based on their previous experience, needs, wants and goals. 4. Present the consumer a few options that feature different shapes or materials, taking time to briefly explain why those options were selected, and then use the consumer's perception of comfort to finalize the selection. 5. Make sure that the insole sits appropriately in the shoe. 6. Trim the insole to further enhance the fit of the insole inside the shoe. 7. Make sure associates understand how to introduce, size, trim and fit insoles to ensure consistency.

Davies: First and foremost, you want to

ensure your employees on the sales floor are knowledgeable and comfortable selling insoles and understand the benefits of what an insole can do for the customer. On top of that, it is important for the associate to ask questions about what activities the customer will be doing in the footwear because this will help to better fit the customer into the correct insole. What is most important is getting the insoles on the customer's feet. Always have them try on an insole and compare the aftermarket insole with the stock insole of the shoe to show the difference. Once you have it on their foot, they will immediately feel the difference.

Chatwin: Most premium athletic shoes come with flat, ineffective, removal inserts. They are removable because they are meant to be replaced with an insole that provides customized fit, cushioning and support. Spenco's Total Support footbed provides “full-contact” support that helps customers lead an active lifestyle. It also helps prevent and reduce pain associated with common foot ailments like plantar fasciitis.

Sheridan: You have to know your product. When you do, you become a consultant versus a salesperson. You explain why the customer needs the product instead of making a sales pitch. You create trust.

How can footwear retailers make the category more important?

Schwartz: For many of our partners, orthotics has become either the most or second most important profit center in their stores. We often make the following suggestion to retailers: Imagine a product that retails at \$60 to \$70, which you can sell to every customer who comes in the store, in every pair of shoes that goes out the door. Now, imagine that this product has the following financial characteristics: fashion trends are irrelevant; seasons and weather are irrelevant; you never mark this product down. Your starting margin is your ending margin. And we're talking close to 60 points. This is what we deliver: the perfect product for a shoe store. If managed correctly, it can dramatically increase each sale your associates make from a top- and bottom-line perspective.

Chatwin: Continued education is critical as many sales associates avoid presenting insoles due to lack of knowledge. Sales as-



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INSOLESTRENDS



10 Seconds' Arch 1000, \$40, is designed for long periods of standing and walking.



Bauerfeind's Sports Insole Run & Walk, \$70, features Weightflex technology.



Blueprint's Cloud Imprint insole, from a new footwear brand, delivers a move-with-the-foot personalized fit.



Dr. Scholl's Active Series, \$24.99, has a Triple Zone Protection system.



FootBalance's Leather Custom-Molded Insole, \$90, is molded to fit the contour of the foot and arch.



Icebug, \$46.95, a patented insole in two thicknesses and three foot shapes.



Knead2Be, \$29, a three-quarter length orthotic designed for lifestyle sneakers and other shoes.



Lynco's Custom Select Medium Arch, \$70.



New Balance's Stability, \$45, combines an anti-blisters top and ABZORB cushioning for comfort.



Sof Sole's Gel Support Insole, \$19.99, features cooling, breathable gel capsules in the footbed.



Sole's Davenport, \$60, with arch support plus a custom fit.



Sorbothane's Ultra Sole, \$26, designed and upgraded for women's biomechanics.



Spenco Total Support Insoles, \$39.99, have a patented 3-POD Modulation System.



Superfeet's Flex series, \$29.95, has three styles that offer differing thicknesses of foam.



Tread Labs' Stride, \$75, features biomechanically designed arch supports that have a lifetime guarantee.

sociates should understand and be able to sell the benefits of orthotic insoles to both prevent and treat injuries. A Spenco insole should be part of every footwear sale. Beyond simply selling a pair of shoes, there is an opportunity to provide a quality fitting experience that gives customers a sense of customization.

Davies: The best way is to make insoles a part of your sales process. Each store base has its own defined sales process, and an insole should always be a part of that process. Not only is it a great add-on sale for the retailer but it also truly benefits the consumer and provides a better selling and fit experience.

Baker: We must ensure that employees are trained to include the footbed – and other key components of the fitting process like socks – as part of the footwear fitting experience. Ensure the footbeds are merchandised on or near the footwear wall. The number one location for the footbeds is on the shoe wall under the shoe shelves. As the consumers sit to try on footwear, they are eye to eye with the footbeds merchandised below the shoe shelves. The merchandising location messages to the consumers the importance of this product category.

Gooch: They can help by educating the consumer on the potential benefits of adding an insole to their shoe. Because shoes are mass produced, they fit people differently. Some people try on a shoe and it's just right from a fit and feel standpoint out of the box. Those people would represent a minority of consumers. The majority of people can use an aftermarket insole to enhance the comfort, fit, feel and function of the shoe.

Sheridan: They have to make sure all of the staff understands each insole brand and they have to buy brands that each have a different point of view. And, of course, they should show an insole with each shoe presentation.

What has your brand done to enhance your presence and sales in retail stores?

Sheridan: We have created unique displays to enhance the appeal of the brand. We take pride in being the company that will do anything to help the customer make the "right" sale.

Davies: One of the best ways we have been able to enhance our presence is not by putting more product in the stores but by getting the right product in stores and then working with the retailer to merchandise the product effectively and tell a compelling story.

Chatwin: Spenco is continually improving our POP and packaging to enhance sell-through. We also provide sales associ-

ate training – live and via 3point5 – for Spenco products, foot biomechanics and foot care. Additionally, Spenco supports store events with attractive marketing programs such as clinics, medical nights, "after-the-run" events, pedicure days, spa days and premium giveaways to educate sales associates and customers.

Gooch: Ensuring that our retail staff is comfortable not only talking to consumers about our products but also knowing when and how to utilize them during a fit is crucial to the continued success of our brand. Over the last two years, we have launched 24 new products that are targeted to specific retail channels and specific types of consumers. To augment this influx of new product, we have begun to train our retail partners on the types of consumers that each of the products has been developed for. We partner with retailers to do targeted training events, help coordinate and assist the medical referral process and facilitate numerous other outreach opportunities.

Baker: We have a patented package to ensure easy touch, engagement and trial of our footbed. You can easily get it in and out of the package to reduce the time of the fitting process. Ensuring a tight assortment of brands helps to ensure your floor staff and the consumers aren't overwhelmed by a wall of confusion.

Schwartz: Technology is at the center of what we do. We have full-time teams on three continents working day in and out on developing our scanners and software platform. The program is designed not only to drive insoles into a major profit center for our partners but also to enhance the personalized service brick-and-mortar retailers provide their customers. From a merchandising perspective, iStep provides the focal point for selling Aetrex orthotics. There is, in fact, a direct correlation between the amount of customers a store scans and the amount of orthotics they sell. Bottom line is: The more people they scan, the more products they sell. In addition, we work with our dealers by providing very affordable rental programs that allow them to place our technology in their stores at virtually no cost as well as to upgrade their software and hardware at no additional cost as we launch new and improved programs. In addition, we have an extensive in-house sales team that supports the program, training staff, working in-store and out-of-store events. And we have a domestic and international call center as well as an online training academy that sales associates can utilize to enhance their knowledge of how to maximize the program. ●

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Wigwam's Ryn sock is a modern classic with Merino wool and a timeless knee-high silhouette.

Serious Business

Socks Mimic Apparel Trends in Latest Offerings More Than in the Past.

By Mackenzie Lobby Havey

As technology and style have improved, socks have become serious business. In just about every category, from outdoors, to performance, to lifestyle, improved comfort and design are contributing to impressive growth. As a result, consumers are realizing that what was once an add-on accessory to their shoe purchases is now a staple of their wardrobe.

Among the enhancements in recent years, improved fiber technology has lent itself to increased durability, better moisture management, and impressive antimicrobial properties that socks of yesteryear don't hold a candle to. What's more, intuitive designs that increase the wearability and support of socks have only added to the appeal of the latest crop. On top of that, brands are upping their game in the style department, seamlessly blending fashion and function. The result is a better product for consumers and higher sales for vendors and retailers.



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The Latest in Fiber Technology

Among a sock's less-flashy features is its durability. While it may not sound like a sexy selling point, it's paramount when it comes to whether a consumer will come back for more. No longer are socks relegated to the trashcan after a year of use, with many of today's brands focusing on new approaches to construction that makes socks everlasting.

Take Smartwool, which is debuting Indestructawool technology this year.

"The key advancement is a patent-pending capability that allows us to target yarns throughout the sock, ensuring the most durable yarns are in high-wear areas, while more comfortable yarns are used throughout the rest of the sock," explains Robert Thomas, men's performance product line manager. "Using multiple yarns throughout has allowed us to tune the fit and durability of the sock."

Fox River takes a somewhat different approach, utilizing NanoGlide, a PTFE nylon that is as long-lasting as they come.

"It's extremely durable, wicks sweat, dries fast and, most importantly, reduces friction, which minimizes hot spots, chafing, and the chance of blisters," says Mike Tyer of Fox River.

A big part of preventing that dreaded blistering and chafing is creating socks that offer superior moisture management. In no other garment is this more important.

My Soxy Feet is addressing this need by weaving Coolmax, Lycra and nylon into strategic areas of their socks. "Nylon is used to create ventilation zones throughout the sock, which are positioned in areas that tend to get most sweat, such as the top of the foot and around the sides of the heel," says Melissa Corp, founder and CEO of My Soxy Feet. "With the combination of Coolmax and nylon ventilation zones, we are able to enhance the breathability of the sock while providing a comfortable and durable feel."

Under Armour's All Season Cool socks combine CoolMax Everyday fabric and cotton to achieve similar results, Laura Siciliano explains: "This sock offers the comfort and feel of natural cotton, but with the addition of CoolMax Everyday, the athlete experiences enhanced drying and cooling to keep them comfortable."

Implementing a different approach, Sof Sole is relying on bamboo in its sport collection.

"Bamboo consumes a significant amount of water in nature, which transpires into

It's not just about the fibers used in the socks, but also the way the sock is put together. This is where fit technology and innovative design come in.

optimal moisture management technology for athletic hosiery," says Brent Lamm, director of development and sourcing for Sof Sole.

Since active feet have a reputation for being particularly stinky, brands are also emphasizing the antimicrobial properties of the fibers they use. For instance, Thorlo relies on Copper Ion technology in their Experia Energy collection.

"Copper is a natural antimicrobial, lending to anti-odor and anti-fungal properties," says Tracy Harris of Thorlo.

"We are adding a silver wash for antimicrobial features, as well as a cushion into the footbed and ventilation on top of the foot," points out Rich Cremin, sales and marketing advisor for Soxxy.

Advancements in Fit and Design

It's not just about the fibers used in the socks, but also the way the sock is put together. This is where fit technology and innovative design come in. DeFeet's Aireator is a perfect example, thanks to its paneled approach.

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TRENDS SOCKS

says DeFeet's Paul Willerton.

Swiftwick's Maxus takes a somewhat parallel approach by targeting the footbed with enhanced cushioning.

"It was very important that the Maxus retain the fit, moisture wicking and blister control that is at the heart of all of our products," says Katy Holmes, Swiftwick's athlete and public relations coordinator. "The Maxus was also engineered to be super breathable on top to keep feet cool."

Additionally, sock vendors are proving that smart design can also contribute to improved foot support. While shoes have traditionally been relied on for this function, it's become a big selling point for socks as well.

"In Feetures socks, concentrated spandex allows the appropriate amount of compression to support the areas of the foot that benefits out customer the most," says product development coordinator Adrienne Johnston.

Hannah Legg, director of marketing for Sockwell, explains how its Stabilizer Series helps provide targeted support to the plantar and Achilles tendon, saying, "They feature enhanced cushioning in the heel and a firm stabilizer



My Soxy Feet Smiley, MSRP \$12.



EC3D Crew Twist Sock, MSRP \$24.99.

plantar brace, making them the perfect socks for the beginner, to the seasoned runner, to the gym rat."

EC3D takes a particularly unique approach to providing sock support via its ingenious twist socks, which require a quick twist of the sock in the process of putting them on to essentially lock in the arch.

"Many health professionals we work with were asking for plantar fasciitis-prevention socks, which is where we got the idea from," explains Carine Villeneuve, founder and vice president at EC3D.

A Greater Emphasis on Style

It comes as no surprise that along with the boom in athleisure wear and urban outdoors style, sock styles are following suit. Today's outdoors and active consumers are looking for socks that accessorize the rest of their outfits, making aesthetics more important than ever.

"Consumers are embracing a progressive outdoor look and socks are no exception," says Thomas, of Smartwool. "In addition, the heritage outdoor look is seeing a resurgence and a modern take on the retro look has allowed for us to

explore a fresh take on everything from our PhD Ski socks to our Classic Hike socks."

Wigwam has certainly embraced that approach, peddling plenty of models that can go from the trails to the streets.

"The casual classics market is looking for styles that can be worn multiple ways for an overall tailored look," explains Laura Ubbelohde-Korff, product manager for Wigwam.

"We want consumers to fill their sock drawers through purchases with our retail partners so we try to offer a wide variety of product to suit every end use, including lifestyle and outdoor," says Luke Eldridge of Fits.

"The line between fashion and function is getting more blurred than ever," adds Lyn Feinson, director of design and development for Darn Tough. "People are choosing to look athletic in their day-to-day activities. The outdoors is aspirational and wearing a hiking sock all day is a reminder of the work/life balance people are striving for."

In addition to the heritage-inspired look, there has been a resurgence of



SecondWind Double Tab Ultra Light Runner



Sockwell Stabilizer Quarter, MSRP \$19.99.



CEP Dynamic+ Run Ultralight, MSRP \$20.



Fitsok Q5, MSRP \$28 (3-pack).



Smartwool Block by Block Micro Socks, MSRP \$16.95.



Swiftwick Maxus Navy, MSRP \$12.99-\$13.99.



New Balance N380, MSRP \$13.



Sof Sol Running Select Sock, MSRP \$9.99.



Fox River Peak Sport Verso Ankle, MSRP \$12.99.



Thorlo 84N Runner, MSRP \$13.99.



Stance Fusion Run Crew, MSRP \$18.



WigWam Ryn, MSRP \$26.



Soxy Pride, MSRP \$35.



Injinji Trail Midweight Crew, MSRP \$15.



FITS Casual Crew, MSRP \$20.99.

color and pattern options in the latest offering of socks hitting the market this year. Not only does this make merchandising easier, it also gives consumers a reason to purchase the same model in multiple hues and designs.

“Color and style are major factors and will not be going away anytime soon,” says Thorlo’s Harris. “As you can tell from our collections, color is definitely a big player in our products.”

Fitsok’s Q5 is another example of the growing available color options. Jeff Bull explains, saying, “It’s a true high-performance running sock that blends a space-dye look with plenty of color. Our goal is to change out colors two times per year, making it a fashion-forward sock model.”

“Patterning is far more colorful and vibrant than ever before and consumers can go crazy with on-trend fashion,” says Tanya Pictor, VP-marketing at Implus Specialty Retail Brands. “Apparel for the past couple of seasons has been far brighter and we believe that socks follow apparel trends.”

To be sure, socks in 2016 aren’t just available in a rainbow of colors, but also a wide array of patterns and designs. Case in point is Stance’s latest line of high-style offerings.

“Our Fall 2016 collection contains fun stripes, tie-dyes, and all-over digital prints for both men and women,” says Stance’s Russell Nadel.

“As categories merge, we see opportunities to deliver the style element through color, patterns, specialty yarns, and designs,” adds New Balance Socks’ Janet Mistor.

Indeed, the available options for 2016 and beyond prove that innovation and fashion go hand-in-hand in the sock category. There’s no doubt these are trends that will only continue to build in coming seasons. ●



CEP Dynamic+ Outdoor Light Merino, MSRP \$25.



Under Armour All Season Wool Mid Crew, MSRP \$14.99.



Balega Ultralight Quarter, MSRP \$13.



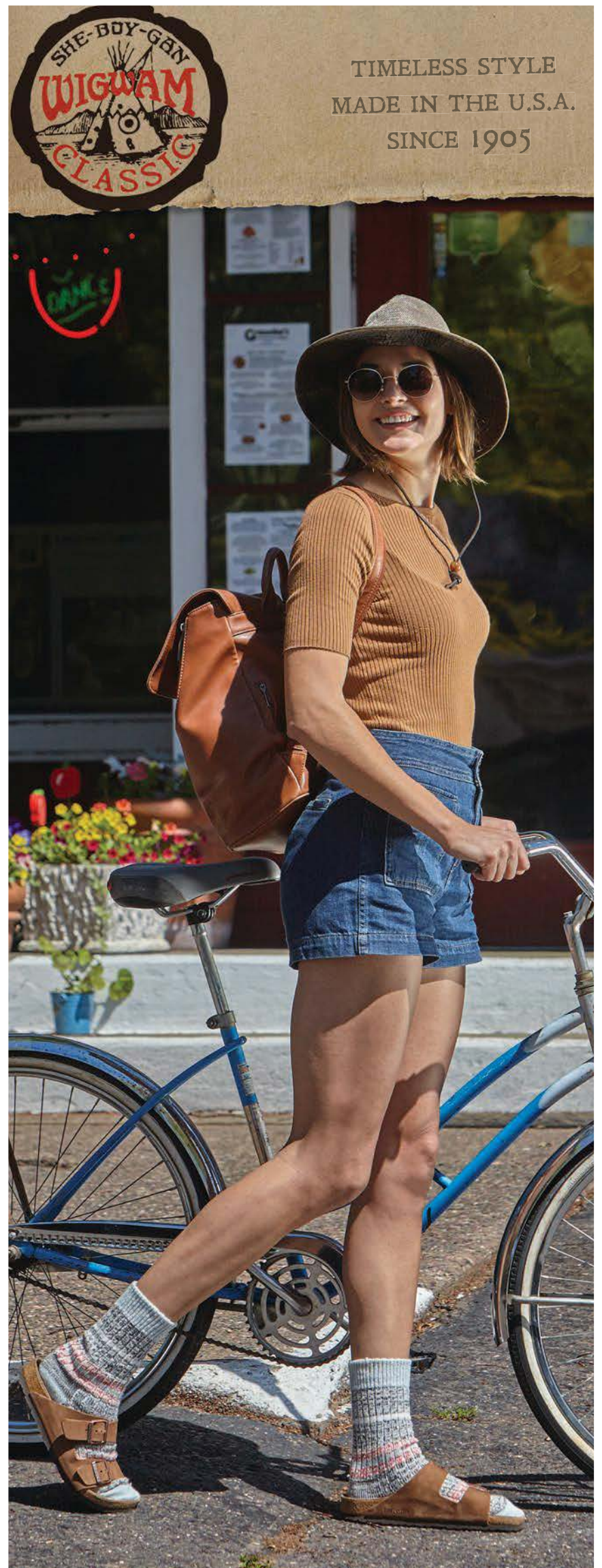
DeFeet Aireator 5" Champion of the World, MSRP \$12.99.



Darn Tough Wandering Stripe, MSRP \$20.



Features! Elite Mini Crew, MSRP \$16.99.



Performance with a Fashion Kick

Trends Have Consumers Hitting the Gym in Footwear that Focuses on Tech and Style.

By Suzanne Blecher

Recently I hit up my regular 6:45 p.m. Tuesday Cycling Class at New York Sports Club only to find a substitute instructor at the helm. Fit as a fiddle, he sported a full cycling kit, yet his shoes hit me by total surprise. He led the class in a pair of retro Nike high-tops that remained unlaced through the duration of our 45 minutes together. And this guy was no beginner — he was a Certified Master Instructor in Indoor Cycling, a Star 3 Spinning Instructor and a certified Indoor Cycling Instructor

with Reebok and Schwinn. So why the switch-up in his shoes?

“The athleisure approach has been more of a reflection on the way people live and work today,” says Judson Vancor, director of training footwear for Reebok. Just like you are more likely to see leggings and denim in the workplace, style is making its way into athletics. In response, Reebok is “building function internally where the product needs the support and stability for the gym, while adding a little lifestyle to the look.”

In the case of the Reebok Hayasu, a seamless bootie is engineered to support the foot through a full range of movement. 3D Ultralite cushions feet from impact, while TurnZone and

With a shift in culture and what is perceived as acceptable to wear inside the gym or to work, comes also a shift in where performance shoes are sold.

grooves on the sole keep feet light while maximizing metatarsal flexibility for dancing.

“Because of our partnerships with Les Mills, UFC and Dance On, we have the ability to infuse creativity and style through our studio fitness range and take a little risk,” Vancor notes. Spring 2017 will see a broader collection focused around dance, boxing and boot camps.

Studio has also brought in entrants such as Under Armour with its SpeedForm StudioLux Mid. Available in black animal print and an aerated mechanic blue model, the shoe “combines with a sleek and sporty minimalist silhouette” with innovative UA SpeedForm technology, according to a product description. Smooth, ultrasonic welded seams offer next-to-skin comfort and a wraparound lace system adds extra support.

Ahnu’s YogaSport line is based in yoga, but is also marketed for wear in boot camp class, TRX and for kettlebell workouts. Available in hues including silver, pepper red and snow melt, the Yoga Flex is positioned for hybrid workouts and features a dual layered air mesh upper for comfort and breathability. An engineered forefoot Flex Zone allows the foot to naturally bend and flex.

Athletic Propulsion Labs has always positioned its brand at the intersection of performance and fashion. “Fashion is becoming more casual and performance-inspired, while athletics is becoming more fashion-inspired. The two worlds are colliding and it’s allowing people to become a lot more experimental in how they style their clothes and footwear,” note APL founders Adam and Ryan Goldston.

The brand’s TechLoom Pro is a statement piece inside the gym or out, while APL’s products crafted in Italy take inspiration from its athletic roots and channel them into lifestyle pieces. To present a streamlined, clean silhouette, the TechLoom Phantom features a neoprene tongue with integrated collar and a lace top allowing the wearer to discreetly tuck their laces.

With a shift in culture and what is perceived as acceptable to wear inside the gym or to work, comes also a shift



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CASUALTECH

in where performance shoes are sold. APL can be found in Barneys New York, Intermix, Nordstrom, Mr Porter and Bandier. Positioned as a luxury activewear retailer, Bandier stocks exclusives from brands including Reebok and Adidas, and also carries curated selections from emerging labels like fair trade footwear label Veja. The Veja digital-printed marble Esplar Leather Sneaker is crafted with organic cotton. The brand sources wild rubber from the Amazon and uses vegetable-tanned leather.

With so much growth in active, especially in lifestyle product, it naturally opens up the category to more fashion. "That is why we are seeing such diversity of looks from retro-inspired styling to the introduction of non-traditional materials and embellishments," explains Vionic creative director Amy Egelja. In addition to its core walking styles, the brand has introduced more contemporary looks in bright new prints and knits, and has diversified silhouettes to include slip-on styles with orthotic support. Vionic's Tourney Active Sneaker is positioned as "hot for fashion, cool for an active lifestyle" with a breathable upper, action lacing system and flex-grooved outsole. The Fyn Active Sneaker is a "sleek" sneaker with contrasting ombre laces, silver accents a breathable mesh upper with a hint of stretch. For Fall, Vionic will launch a cupsole to bridge the gap between active and casual.

Consumers should be careful not to go crazy with fashion in the gym, as risk of injury increases when using a shoe that is not designed specifically for the activity.

"You want to have the best equipment for the activity," says Erin VanTrease, assistant product line manager at Ryka. Designed specifically for studio classes like Zumba, the brand's retro-inspired Tenacity high tops have Re-Zorb cushioning for impact, as well as ankle and lateral support. Pivot points on the outsole are for twisting and turning movements.

So while "fashion before comfort" is alive and well, according to VanTrease, it does not trump performance. In the gym, "fashion is important, but not at the expense of function." ●

APL TechLoom Phantom

Vionic Tourney Active Sneaker

Ryka Tenacity

Vionic Tourney Active Sneaker

Ryka Tenacity

Ryka Tenacity





Vionic Fyn



APL TechLoom Phantom



APL TechLoom Pro



Reebok Hayasu



RUGGED

INDIVIDUALISM

A first look at Spring 2017 shows that shoe brands are offering tough shoes suitable for these tough times. • Durable. Sturdy. Versatile. And that's just for starters. • Spring footwear has a rugged feel to it, uncharacteristic for a season known for sandals, skimmers, flats and beach shoes. • This is most evident in the color palette. While there are pops of color in most lines, there are more serious hues than we typically see for Spring: browns, greys and even blacks. The rugged influence is also evident in the use of upper materials such as canvas and suede. • The individualism is present in fashion silhouettes. The stacked heel remains an important detail and women will be walking tall on platforms for at least one more season. And the Chelsea and other boot silhouettes have extended into spring in a quest to create boots for all seasons. • We don't know if it's a good sign, but it was that well-known shoe maven Herbert Hoover who is credited with the first use of the phrase "Rugged Individualism." • Hoover believed in Darwinism and an "up by the bootstraps" philosophy. We wonder if he ever imagined the bootstraps would look this good.



Timberland Killington Hiker Chukka

COMFORTTRENDS



Clarks: Grace Lola with stacked heel



Naot: Chief (front) & Magnate (back) for Men



Mephisto: Romane in Pewter bucksoft



SAS: Walk Easy for Women in Sage



Waldlaufer: Women's Dana Oxford



SAS: Men's Move On in Camel



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COMFORTTRENDS



Aetrex: Adrianna with round buckle



Samuel Hubbard: Chelsea Boot



Naot: Sophia Sandals



Waldlaufer: Men's Tom Dynamic Oxford



Victoria: Antracita in multicolor



Rockport: Raelyn Ballet Flat



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Dansko's Charlie Sneaker from the Coventry Collection



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Atlanta Shoe Market I August 20th-22nd
Cobb Galleria Centre I Booths 1320-1322

COMFORT**TRENDS**



Naot: Intrigue in Latte



Vionic: Calypso Closed Toe Wedge



Vionic: Tansy Open Toe Wedge



Alegria: Essence in Icy Blue



Rockport: Jaxson Captoe in brown



Rockport: Truflex Tie for women



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Birkenstock: Arran for Men in Blue Canvas

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What Is the Bandwagon and Where Do I Get On?

Pondering Shoe Materials, Small Brand Survival, and The Meaning of Life.

By Cregg Weinmann

Isaac Newton's description of motion is well known; an object in motion stays in motion until a force acts upon it. Once an object is moving it has momentum and with sufficient mass it can roll over anything. When a footwear trend has momentum, one has the choice of jumping on the bandwagon or missing an opportunity. In the running footwear world, retailers are on the front lines, seeing many trends come and go, and their ability to balance the opportunities and near misses are critical to their business success. So, too, with many of the smaller running shoe brands in the food chain, if they resonate with consumers they can make great strides, so they need to be tuned in to the key elements for growth. Though the shoe brands do scientific testing, runners need help sorting through the fit and function of running shoes, and the default setting in the vetting process falls to the Running Specialty stores. Retailers and several brands from each corner of the

"I believe the extended use of stride analysis and engineering is as exciting as physical technology."

**Eddie Johnson,
A Snail's Pace,
Fountain Valley, CA**

map revealed some telling information about the latest materials, small brand survival, and the meaning of life.

We have seen some bandwagons in recent years, what is the latest and who is jumping on board?

"Many of the companies out there are implementing new technologies into current and future product. Saucony with Ever-Run, Brooks with SuperDNA, New Balance with Fresh Foam, ASICS with FlyteFoam, and many others, even 361 Degrees with a proprietary cushioning system of PU encapsulated EVA. They are all worthy of note. Although I believe there is still room for the traditionally posted midsole, many of these technologies incorporate ride and fit characteristics to help guide the gait through an ideal path. Of course, many of the companies are also looking beyond the lower leg into the entire movement of running to fend off potential injury to the athletes. It's a very exciting time in running. As for Minimal or Maximal, I believe there is a place for most categories if they are used properly. I see the pendulum swinging

back toward the middle with the exception of drop, where I see consumers asking for lower than traditional ratios — say eight millimeters or so.

"I believe the use of new technology and processes is amazing. As has been the case in the past, each season the shoes seem to get better. Upper material sourcing is so much more advanced, overlay application makes many shoes seamless, midsole technology is more cushioned, responsive and/or durable, and all of it seems to keep getting lighter somehow. Actually, I believe the extended use of stride analysis and engineering is as exciting as physical technology."

Eddie Johnson, A Snail's Pace, Fountain Valley, CA

"Probably the latest we are seeing in terms of thinking are guiderails in shoes, from brands like Brooks and Nike. We are seeing a lot of thoughtful shaping and cutting of outsoles to work better with the support of the foot from landing to takeoff. Also, we continue to see advancements in the responsiveness of midsole compounds such



Altra Lone Peak 3.0 in women's sunset pink (mesh)



361° Strata Women's version

as Fresh Foam (from New Balance), Everun (from Saucony), Boost (from Adidas) and Lunarlon (from Nike).

"The biggest two things that have really advanced today's running shoes are lightweight materials and better uppers. We see this in materials like Flyknit, engineered mesh, seamless technologies and fewer overlays and less glue."

Matt Lucas, Luke's Locker, Dallas, TX

"The material evolution, such as the Adidas Ultra Boost, New Balance Fresh Foam, and Hoka One One RMAT, along with the geometric design of midsoles currently taking place has created a sense of urgency, not to replicate, but to develop newer materials that are lighter, more durable and feature the ability to design and incorporate more effective geometric benefits such as stability, meta rocker or other end use with one midsole versus piecing midsoles together.

"These innovations have created greater value for the consumer. Lighter, more cushioning, more responsive, seamless uppers are creating greater value because products are delivering what customers want, which is a great ride with superior cushioning and stability. Customers do feel the difference and value."

John Rogers, Fleet Feet Maine Running

"Have you noticed how the three most successful new players (Hoka, Skechers and Altra) are all evolving towards each other? Skechers and Altra looking more like Hoka, and Hoka's are starting to look like more traditional shoes."

Bob Coll, Eugene Running Company

What have you done to distinguish your

brand in the larger field of running shoes available to runners today?

"For 2016 in celebration of Karhu's centennial year, we wanted to return to our roots using a pre-existing logo and word mark that is more gentle, sympathetic and recognizable. We made the decision to combine the Performance and Legend logos so the look is streamlined and allows us to tell a complete brand story.

"The new look has been greatly appreciated from our retail partners. On the specialty run side of the business, stores recognize the improved fit, feel and ride of the shoes. It's never easy getting fit dialed in, but our new design and development center has reworked the shape of our lasts improving the fit of our uppers and accentuating the design of the Fulcrum Technology. As for our Legend lifestyle business, we have focused on a top tier distribution. This means the silhouettes, materials and models brought to market need to be premium and celebrated as such."

Huub Valkenburg, CEO, Karhu International

"You never really know how things are going to go, sticking to a plan is not my style. For me it's about the journey. I don't know where we will be a year from now, but I can tell you we will continue to add products to our line-up, including apparel, listen to our customers, be inspired and hopefully inspire a few along the way."

Everett Carson, President, Carson Footwear

"You know, there's been imitation, but thus far, no one has really gotten that close. You see wider athletic shoes and shoes with less heel elevation, but nobody else is doing cushioned Zero Drop shoes that

We come up with clever ideas, but often the simple 'I never thought about that' is so powerful—something like 'Shoes that are actually shaped like human feet... imagine that!'

Golden Harper, President, Altra Footwear

are actually shaped like healthy human feet. We believe our product is so unique that it's pretty easy to keep the message fresh. I actually have to constantly remind myself and everyone internally that our message is still very new and unique to nearly everyone out in the real world. We come up with clever ideas, but often the simple 'I never thought about that' is so powerful — something like 'Shoes that are actually shaped like human feet... imagine that!' Or, remember in pre-school when we were taught not to put the square shape in the triangular hole? Most people have never thought about the fact that they are putting their feet, which are naturally relatively square shaped up front, into shoes that are triangular shaped and pointy up front. At the end of the day, keeping it fresh is all about honesty and communicating benefits, rather than marketing fluff. We've been hearing 'Use our cushion to save your knees' for decades, even though the science shows that it doesn't work."

Golden Harper, President, Altra Footwear

"We have been fortunate as our team has years of experience in the industry so we have been able to get in front of many buyers and store owners. This opportunity enables us to demonstrate how quickly we can improve and provide relevant product solutions.

"One of our primary focuses is running and the most important service arm to the runner, running specialty. It is no secret that the channel is evolving as consumer behavior is changing, making it a tighter market than in years past.

"We also decided that we were going to get in the ring with the big boys in the

RUNNING ANALYSIS



Karhu Flow 6 IRE

space of performance running, opting not to enter the space in a niche way. Some say we are crazy; some applaud the opportunity to sell a new brand to a large portion of their consumers. The consumers that have tried the brand have also told us they are willing to purchase a new brand.

"Considering we did not have a complete and meaningful running and training collection until September of 2015, our progress has been tremendous. Of course, we would like to be growing quicker. Moving forward we are confident those desires will be met with enhanced marketing and improved product."

Jim Monahan, President, 361°

"Starting a running shoe brand from scratch is a big challenge and, truthfully, we came out of the gate a little bumpy. We made some mistakes, had to pull back, re-tool, and sort of re-launch this company. This is a competitive market with many strong brands. But we believe that there is a genuine need for our product. We believe that Topo can help deliver a better, more natural running experience and we've cultivated a really strong community of supporters who feel that way, too. Although we are small, the groundswell of support from consumers and our key dealers enabled us to double sales last year. And so far this year, re-orders alone are up over 80%. That re-order number is important. It tells us the product is selling through, so even though the market is in a bit of decline, we know our products are beginning to resonate with runners and fitness enthusiasts."

Tony Post, Founder CEO, Topo Athletic

"Of course, we would like to be growing quicker. Moving forward we are confident those desires will be met with enhanced marketing and improved product."

Jim Monahan, President, 361°

How much emphasis do you place on incorporating new materials and advancements in the shoes?

"A lot! But not ever enough that it overshadows our core values of leaving people's feet in their natural position and helping people to run better, etc. With that said, it's a constant discussion to find better materials and new technology. We are always trying something new and even a little out there in the hopes that it might be better than anything else out there right now. Sometimes advancements can be simple stuff though, like our Sandwiched Stone-Guard or GaiterTrap, which are actually just really simple things that no one has thought of doing before for some reason."

Golden Harper, Altra

"One of our hidden strengths as a brand is on the material side. Hence, Q!KFOAM. Advancements are required and especially nice when both lab data and consumer feedback validate the direction."

Jim Monahan, 361°

"Even though I was a competitive runner in college, I came up thru the brown shoe business. I was lucky enough to learn the importance of crafted details in high quality shoe making, the importance shaping lasts, skiving edges, creating seamless interiors and durable constructions. But for some years now, the running shoe business has gotten away from the craftsmanship of shoemaking, using marketing and visible technology to drive consumer excitement — whether there was a real benefit to that technology or not."

"At Topo, we are focused on providing what you need, and stripping away what you don't. Sometimes what you take away from a shoe is just as important as what you put into it. We were one of the first brands to make printed uppers (mostly because we couldn't afford microfiber minimums) eliminating threads and heavy layers of material. Recently, we pioneered the use of a single-layer waterproof and breathable laminate through a partnership with eVent Technology. Through this award winning innovation, we've managed to produce the lightest, waterproof trail running shoe on the market today."

"But what we think about most is our fit — and although it's a simple concept, ours is a unique fit. All Topo Athletic shoes fit roomy in the toes but snug in the heel and waist. Part of it is in how we shape our last, but some of it comes from our designs, our constructions, the materials we use, and how we layer or combine materials. We still try to bring a little of that old world craftsmanship to modern athletic shoe making."

Tony Post, Topo Athletic

"We work closely with our new design and development center in Asolo, Italy, to learn, source and implement the latest innovations in footwear construction. Karhu selected the team for their long history working in the shoe business and we feel confident our quality, improved look and timetable will be better. We have been impressed with the construction techniques at our disposal from midsole materials to upper welding and last shaping."

Huub Valkenburg, Karhu

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RUNNING ANALYSIS



Carson Red Zombie Racer

What efforts are you making in order to aim for continued growth?

"Owning a marketing and publishing company I have a pretty good understanding of what can be accomplished with mass marketing, I have also witnessed what happens to companies that grow too fast. I plan to continue with the grass roots approach until our foundation is solid and our processes are mature."

Everett Carson, President, Carson Footwear

"First, we are striving to broaden our SKUs so that we make a shoe for the needs of virtually any type of runner and body type. We are also adding more colors and really trying to emphasize our position as the only running shoe brand making an entire line of truly female specific shoes. Women runners are so important to us, as they often have more foot problems that we feel we are a solution for. When we can get a woman to get over the fact that our shoes look different at first and just wear them, they tend to become incredibly loyal."

"Also, we are constantly expanding our education platform and our tech reps to help educate people on protecting their bodies by running better. We're also trying to get the message out there that Footshape Zero Drop shoes are the best way to get newer runners started off with good habits."

"Additionally, our IQ shoe will be an incredible tool in coaching and educating runners on how to become a better, more efficient, lower impact runner. We think this will also be a great tool for retailers to use to analyze people and make a recommendation based on form, landing, and

Even in our thicker more cushioned shoes, we still try to deliver some of those ingredients of a more natural running experience.

Tony Post, Topo Athletic

imbalances that actually make a difference, rather than just looking at "over pronation" which has nearly no scientific backing or ability to make a lot of difference."

Golden Harper, Altra

"The running category and the consumers that occupy the space change daily. We will make sure that we do not define ourselves solely as a running brand. Diversity, both in product and marketing, is important as a vehicle to introduce consumers to our running product."

Jim Monahan, 361°

"When we launched, we launched in three categories: Road, Trail, Gym. While road gets all the market attention, and it clearly owns the big share of the business, in many markets we see more upside opportunity in trail. When I hear stores tell me that trail is 3-6 percent of their business, I think there must be a void there that's not being met. I think there is an opportunity for stores to sell light, fast, versatile trail product that excites consumers. Sorry for the pun, but that's a place where we've seen traction."

"I suppose another opportunity has come through the expansion of our platforms — many people thought we were exclusively minimal, but now they see we make shoes ranging from 15 to 28mm of stack height. Even in our thicker more cushioned shoes, we still try to deliver some of those ingredients of a more natural running experience. Low drop platforms, allowing the toes to spread, keeping the shoes lightweight without sacrificing durability."

"Finally, we dedicate a good portion of our time and research to the importance

of strength and mobility. Running can wear down the body — having been a runner for over 40 years, I know this first hand. But putting in the time to do strength and mobility as a part of your training can help make the body stronger and more resistant to breakdowns. That's why we dedicate a whole portion of our website to Accu-Running, to help runners perform self-diagnosis along with strength and mobility training so they can run healthier."

Tony Post, Topo Athletic

"We have prioritized improving fit in a new project for 2017. We can't say too much at this point, but we're looking to implement a new system that allows Karhu shoes to be constructed in a much more anatomical way. We are using all of the tools and knowledge at our disposal to shape our lasts for a more comfortable ride."

Huub Valkenburg, Karhu

What can the brands (or retailers) do to continue growth in the running category?

"We are at a critical time for the running specialty industry. Other distribution channels have developed profitably for the major brands and the importance of strategic partnerships within the specialty sector are more important than ever. Specialty retailers will need to nurture partnerships with targeted brands. Specialty retailers will not remain important partners for every brand so targeting brands with growth strategies at specialty is critical. Brands will protect their interests and drive growth in all channels. Growth in specialty running will be consolidated to a handful of interested brands. Niche brands will only succeed by

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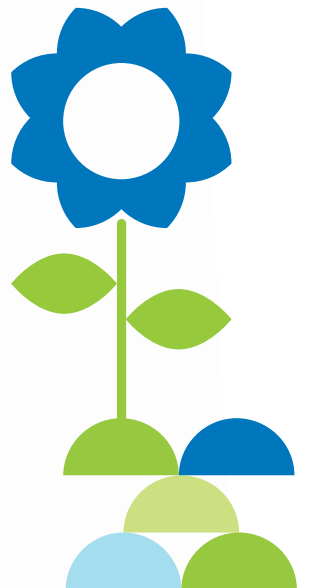
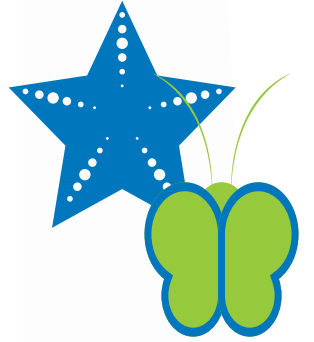
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RUNNING ANALYSIS



Topo Terraventure (women's purple)

penetrating larger distribution channels so specialty retailers must be prepared for it.
Bob Coll, Eugene Running Company

"I believe, first and foremost, brands and retailers must continue to aggressively protect their integrity both in-store and online. The consistent discounting is diminishing the integrity and value of the products, services, and the channel. Vendors create great product. We, as a channel create great value in stocking and counseling consumers on purchasing decisions. We all need to step up and make a stand. We are not a discount channel.

"In addition to that, we need to continue to make running and fitness fun and exciting. Whether that be non-running events like many of them out there or traditional training programs for beginning athletes, we need to make it fun, social, and exciting.
Eddie Johnson, A Snail's Pace

"Work together to formulate well-thought-out distribution and marketing strategies for the next three to five years. Brands are competing with their retail partners, and this is not helpful."
Matt Lucas, Luke's Locker

"Improve service. Do a better job connecting with customers. Solve customers' problems. Make their stores more inviting and inclusive. Service, service, service. You have to work on all of the business basics and get better at them every year."
Kris Hartner, Naperville Running Company, Naperville, IL

Anything you'd like to add about the

The smaller brands, which we love to have as part of what we do, need to offer solutions to our customer's problems that aren't being addressed by the brands we currently carry. They can't just be replacements for what we already have. We don't need or want that."

Kris Hartner,
Naperville Running
Company

survival of the smaller brands, running footwear, or the meaning of life?

"I'm not sure what to say about the smaller brands. They make wonderful, competitive product. Many are definitely worthy of being on the wall but it is such a competitive market out there. The big brands continue to innovate and make amazing product. I always think back to the major brands and they started somewhere too. I guess my questions for new brands is two-fold. One, is the product different and better than what is offered on the wall already? And two, will it bring in new customers or are they simply going to split the pie into smaller pieces?
Eddie Johnson, A Snail's Pace

"The meaning of life is to continue to run. To stop running is to stop living. The easiest way to continue running is to keep it fun. Running shoes are fun, they directly affect our running experience."
Bob Coll, Eugene Running Company

"Sun Tzu said 'Every battle is won or lost before it is even fought.' Whoever is best prepared, while also making those finite adjustments during the battle will win.... That means we must be prepared to know our customer, know how to communicate and reach them, know how to provide and train our associates to provide an experiential quotient to them, while making tactical adjustments to execute the plans we put in place to acquire and retain our customers."
John Rogers, Fleet Feet Maine Running

"The smaller brands are more of a struggle now than they've ever been. The bigger brands have rounded out their lines, cover

more bases, have more to offer, know how to service our accounts, have dedicated customer service and reps, have better terms and programs, can help us move through product that doesn't work, and on and on.

"The smaller brands, which we love to have as part of what we do, need to offer solutions to our customer's problems that aren't being addressed by the brands we currently carry. They can't just be replacements for what we already have. We don't need or want that."

Kris Hartner, Naperville Running Company

"I believe the meaning of life is like a can of Spam — it seems simple but I'm just not sure what it is."

Eddie Johnson, A Snail's Pace

"Create as much energy as possible.... positive or negative, unfortunately the world has both. I prefer positive."
Everett Carson, Carson Footwear

"I'm a big believer that life is about improving ourselves and a big part of that is helping to improve others. I'm a big believer in Karma, make the right choice for the common good, and eventually things will work out better for you. Even if it's in ways you don't expect. Altra was never about making money, but about helping to fix injured runners. I think it's been successful because the motives have been pure."

Golden Harper, President Altra Footwear

"Respect the past, keep an eye on the future, run today."

Huub Valkenberg, Karhu ●

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Cat Power

Puma's Jay Piccola Sounds Off on a Good Year. By Jennifer Ernst Beaudry

PUMA IS FEELING THE HEAT

This year, everything the company touched has seemingly turned to gold. It held its first fashion show for its Fenty label with pop icon Rihanna and saw the limited edition shoes and sandals she created crash websites and sell out in store almost instantly to waiting fans. It signed reality TV starlet and social media maven Kylie Jenner as the face of its women's training line, released collab product with streetwear players such as Bape, Kith and Alife, and saw its newly signed Leicester City Football Club win the English Premier League championship.

It's a turnaround for the brand, which has struggled to regain some of the casual-cool style cachet it enjoyed in the early aughts.

According to the brand, footwear sales in particular have been a standout, seeing a rise of 8.5 percent currency

adjusted in Q1, the seventh consecutive quarter of increase, driven by sportstyle, training, running and women's product.

NPD analyst Matt Powell says Puma's overall U.S. sales are up 35 percent through April — and that the women's business has risen an eye-popping 75 percent, the “halo effect of having [Rihanna] as an endorser,” he says.

On the strength of that heat, he adds, Puma is once again in the top 10 best-selling athletic footwear brands in the U.S. — a position the Westford, MA-based brand hasn't occupied in years.

Jake Jacobs, EVP and CEO for North America for New York-based Foot Locker, says the Fenty trainer has had strong sales. And that as a lead partner with the Clyde relaunch, the retailer has high expectations for the brand as a whole.

“Puma has an advantage because they fill a real niche — they're a true lifestyle brand,” he says. “Not only do they have relevant classic styles, they're good at new creations, too.”

John Hall, the newly appointed



“Our women's business is trending up in the high double-digits currently, and one of Puma's major priorities for 2016 is highlighting the women's category. Our women's business will soon be on par with our men's.”

EVP, division president and chief merchandising officer for Finish Line, concurs. “We are achieving steady growth with Puma and are encouraged with the recent sales of many of their iconic styles,” he says. “Puma continues to energize their brand. [And] their partnership and collaboration with Rihanna and Kylie exemplifies their commitment to the millennial customer.”

But Jay Piccola, president of Puma North America, says that the brand isn't resting on its laurels.

“One thing about our industry that you can always count on is rapid change, so nothing surprises us,” Piccola says. “Our challenge is to anticipate that change and respond to it quickly.”

Here, Piccola talks partnership, playing the trend game and what's still to come for 2016.

Let's start with Rihanna. Has that relationship been transformative?

“Our partnership with Rihanna has been incredible and has really set the bar in offering a strong marketing proposition and product point of view. The Fenty Leadcat Fur Slide sold out across the world in less than an hour at numerous retailers. We had similar success with the Fenty Creeper and Fenty Trainer.”

Is it doing better than you expected?

“I always prepare for the worst and hope for the best. She has creative license to everything and she's involved and she's a force in that involvement. There was some skepticism as to what the end product would be and the consumer acceptance of it, but the end product is unbelievable and consumer acceptance has exceeded everything we thought. It's been tremendous. This was the evaporation of product in seconds. It's not huge quantities, but it's evaporation. A furry sandal that shut down websites? It was that crazy. For a moment we wondered about the commerciality and she put her foot on the gas a little bit, but we got back in stock in a hurry, and they'll be new launches throughout the year. In September, her apparel hits.”

Another high-profile get was Puma's relationship with Kylie Jenner. How has that relationship impacted the brand?

Kylie Jenner in a new ad for Puma's Forever Fierce women's training line.



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“Kylie Jenner has been a big catalyst to our initial success of the Fierce women’s training shoe, and we look forward to our next chapter with Kylie. [With sales of the Fierce product] I don’t want to call it evaporation because it was significantly larger number pairs, but the sell-throughs were unbelievably big. Retailers were broken in sizes in a matter of days — on some large numbers of pairs. She’s surprised me and she’s staying on the team for a good bit longer.”

Was it satisfying to see it do so well after Kanye West took to Twitter to say “1000% there will never be a Kylie Puma anything”?

“I don’t want to say anything about a competitor or their marketing asset, but I have to say, yes it was.”

Puma did “sportstyle” sooner than anyone else —do you feel like the times have finally caught up to you?

“I’ve been around long enough that I believe strongly that we invented that space and we stuck to it— what’s happening currently is a derivative thereof. We don’t reference it as much as we used to, but maybe it’s because it just comes naturally. We still consider ourselves a performance brand.”

Does that mandate come from the top?

“One of the first things Bjørn [Gulden, who took the CEO position in 2013] did after joining the brand was establishing the mantra of “Forever Faster.” His vision is to make Puma the fastest sports brand in the world, whether it’s in performance or lifestyle. It’s no secret that the U.S. is the most influential athletic market. Bjørn sees the opportunity this offers and has been quite supportive in driving our business by focusing brand investments on it. And with what’s hot today [with athleisure], sometimes that overshadows the fact that some of what’s going on is performance. Women’s training gets looked on so much as sportstyle and sports lifestyle that it gets lost as truly performance.”

How big is women’s for you?

“Our women’s business is trending up in the high double-digits and one of Puma’s priorities for 2016 is highlighting the women’s category. Women’s will soon be on par with our men’s.”

Do you expect it to catch up soon?

“There’s so much hype and excitement with specific women’s collections it skews the mindset, as it were. Men’s will

“We’re all looking forward to watching our brand ambassador, Usain Bolt, reaffirm his title as the fastest man in the world.”



still be a bigger percentage in 2016. As we go into 2017, that’s when we have a chance for an even battle, not including the kids business percentage, which we expect to grow as well.”

What will fuel that women’s growth?

“For Fall, we’ll launch a cross-category women’s campaign that will really define the ‘gym meets runway’ proposition and will allow us to showcase our training as well as sportstyle product. After all, that is how women live and dress — disruptiveness, comfort, innovation and looking good are no longer independent of each other. Despite the prevalence of the athleisure trend and the saturation of the women’s market, there is still a white space that just isn’t a natural fit for our competitors. The athleisure trend isn’t going anywhere, so we foresee major women’s growth for years to come.”

What are you doing to specifically address athleisure?

“You’ll see some unique executions where the fashion world and the running world collide — it’s not Puma’s tried-and-true running. Running a marathon is one thing, and then wearing shoes that work and perform but can be used for other things is another. We’ll still have the classical models, but where we’ll drive growth in the malls and street accounts, will be this new form of running. We’ve gotten a lot of positive feedback, and some orders as well. It was going to launch for Spring ’17, but we previewed it with some with some very important retailers, and one or two models are being brought forward for second half. We’re excited, and I think that’s a testament to how important the U.S. market is. When an important retailer wants something, we’re shaking the trees to deliver it.”

What retail markets will be key for the balance of the year?

“Retailers seem to be restless and looking for something different — different brands and different ways to get new consumers in their doors. The mall and the mall kid remain a critical distribution zone for Puma and our goal is to connect with our target consumer through the right stores in the right malls and environments. But we have also re-established strong relationships with key retailers that are giving us the chance to create better brand experiences within their store environments. Our goal is to bring our brand to life in the best possible way and connect with our target consumer in their natural habitat.”

Will you be looking to add to your stable of endorsers?

“Bryson DeChambeau [who signed with Puma in April] made an exciting addition to golf for us. And I have to dance around this and I can’t say very much, but there are things in final contract form that will be very exciting for back-to-school and some things that are already in the offing that are yet to be announced. We continue to expand our ambassador roster in all categories, whether sport or entertainment.”

The retro business has been on fire. How are you planning to leverage your history there?

“The Classics category has been showing major growth over the past year, and given that this is our sweet spot, it’s had nothing but positive impact on our retail and wholesale businesses. On the men’s side, we’re experiencing success with classics like the Suede and Roma. The relaunch of the Clyde later this year will be an exciting addition to our Sportstyle initiative. These shoes have a great history with our brand and we are really proud to bring them back to the forefront. Clyde [Frazier] was actually here [at our headquarters] all week, looking styling, as usual.”

What will that rollout look like?

“We’re excited about the different iterations — there are numerous drops this year, with collaborations to build heat and then significant pairage as we go into 2017.”

The Olympics kick off next month. What are you planning?

“Since there are so many limitations surrounding the Olympics as a brand, we have to be a bit more creative with how we approach it. At the games you will see federations such as Jamaica, Cuba, Barbados, Switzerland and more in Puma. [We’ll use] key in-line product to create a cohesive story between what is seen at the Olympics in Rio this summer or what athletes are training in for the Olympics and what will be seen in-store.

“There will be a new running shoe called the Ignite Dual and it is the key footwear story for that timeframe. And track and field are part of Puma’s history. Golf, a new story for the Olympics, will feature Rickie Fowler and Lexi Thompson playing for the U.S. team while other Puma golfers will represent other countries. And, of course, we’re all looking forward to watching our brand ambassador, Usain Bolt, reaffirm his title as the fastest man in the world.” ●

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A Colorful Story

Alegria Cracked the Market With Bright Hues 10 Years Ago and is Now Focused on Lifestyle.

By Mark Sullivan

Alegria president Scott Cates still carries around the brochure from when the brand launched almost 10 years ago. The accordion style fold-out brochure featured one style – a clog popular with nurses – in 22 colors.

Today, Alegria has 47 styles and 450 SKUS. The company will ship one million pair globally this year, 95 percent of that in the United States. And Alegria now generates 44 percent of its revenue from sandals, a far cry from its start as “a clog company.”

Alegria is a featured brand on QVC and is growing with accounts such as Belk Stores, but Cates says the majority of its accounts are independents and uniform stores that

first embraced the brand nearly 10 years ago when it branched out from making shoes for diabetics.

The brand launched out of a California company called Peppergate, which was known for its wide width shoes for diabetics. Alegria launched with a single style — a quirky, colorful clog that used a cork and soft polyurethane footbed.

“When we first came out with the shoes, retailers wanted to order the black or brown clogs, but we told them they had to buy yellow or blue, too,” Cates recalls. “And it worked. Retailers who bought the colors did great and stores that bought the black and brown failed.”

Indeed, color was Alegria’s calling card to crack the competitive clog market in March, 2008, when it shipped its first shoe just as the country was entering a major economic crisis. The colorful and affordable shoes (average price today is \$119 a pair) caught on



Scott Cates,
Alegria president

with teachers, nurses and other women who were on their feet all day and the company with the unusual brand name that even some of its core consumers struggled to pronounce grew beyond expectations.

“We’d get containers of shoes in from China and blow through them and then be out of inventory for two months,” Cates recalls. “It was crazy.”

Company founder Johnny Chen now lives in China for half the year to make sure production flows smoothly and Alegria is working out of its third warehouse near the airport in Ontario, CA, to help facilitate timely shipments to retailers.

Cates credits Alegria’s growth to a fiercely loyal consumer, who he claims buys an average of 3.5 pair of the brand’s shoes in the year she buys her first pair. “She’ll start out with a pair in a conservative shade, maybe even



Alegria has come a long way from black and brown clogs.



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1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

DOLLARS & \$EN\$E: Do You Control Your Money or Does Your Money Control You?

Noah Barsky, Ph.D.

Far more than a seminar in accounting, this session connects strategy, decision making, and financial results in a very memorable way. Learn how to understand and communicate the economic importance of every decision made by store owners, managers, and employees. Turn great ideas into great business ideas with practical tools and techniques that enhance customer loyalty, motivate employees, and deliver financial returns. Specifically, attendees will learn about:

- How your store's profitability compares to its NSRA peers' latest results
- The amazing results of small improvements in inventory turns
- How to most effectively communicate your vision of business success to your staff

This seminar provides practical guidance on how to meaningfully communicate strategy, run a better business, and create a more successful enterprise for all key stakeholders.

Dr. Barsky will also review the latest financial metrics for the independent footwear channel.



Dr. Noah Barsky is a professor at the Villanova University School of Business, a visiting professor for the INSEAD MBA program in Europe, and author of five books and over sixty articles. His research and teaching focus on performance measurement, business planning, risk assessment, and contemporary financial reporting issues. His professional experience includes practice in the fields of accounting and finance as an analyst, auditor, and business consultant. He holds active licenses as both a

Certified Public Accountant and Certified Management Accountant.

3:15 p.m. - 4:45 p.m.

How the Best Get Better

Robert Stevenson

Robert Stevenson's program will address the many facets of successfully operating a retail shoe store. He will address the Essential Habits for Success when it comes to leadership, handling change, sales and customer service, along with establishing the right corporate culture. He will break down the Art and Science of Selling into a no-nonsense set of guidelines that will make even the most novice salesperson a success. You will learn about:

- Strategies for Optimizing Customer Service.
- What is necessary to break bad habits.
- How certain habits will increase profitability, efficiencies, and productivity.
- How to master the skills to gain willing cooperation.
- Identifying and implementing the core competencies for success.
- The skills needed to be a star sales producer.



A widely recognized speaker, Robert Stevenson has owned several companies, sold in over 20 countries and authored four books; including the best-selling *How to Soar Like an Eagle in a World Full of Turkeys* and the latest, *Raise Your Line*. He is an expert at building a high performance culture, and has spoken to over 2,500 companies, interviewed more than 10,000 employees, managers, and senior executives, and worked with over 250 different industries. Over 2 million people have benefited from his powerful and thought provoking programs. His client list is comprised of Prudential, FedEx, Berkshire Hathaway, Harley-Davidson, American Express, and more.

2:30 p.m. - 3:15 p.m. *Networking*

Spend time meeting or catching up with independent retailers, vendor representatives and industry experts. Discuss the day's seminar topics, what's working for you in your business, and what's new on the horizon.

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BRANDPROFILE

black or brown,” Cates says. “And then she’ll come back with a friend and buy something in a color and after that she is buying shoes to complement her wardrobe.”

If you’re wondering how Cates can feel such a close connection to the brand’s customer, it’s probably because he talks to so many of them when they call into one of Alegria’s shows on QVC. The brand started selling on QVC in September 2013 and is featured four times a week on the network. Cates personally handles Alegria’s new product launches on QVC and says “the exposure has been great for our brand,” he says.

“The QVC consumer parallels Alegria’s so it’s a great way for us to be in front of our core shopper on a regular basis.”

Going forward, Cates wants to build distribution with boutiques and independents. The brand has stayed away from big-box retailers and Cates says he prefers to work with stores that can tell Alegria’s comfort and fit story, which is based on its footbed. By changing out the footbed in the shoes (using its own or the model the brand provides) consumers can make the shoes accommodate a wider foot. While color helped the brand crack the market, Cates says the fit is what keeps customers coming back for more.

“Changing out the footbed is like putting new tires on your car,” he says. “It creates a whole new feel.” ●

The brand has stayed away from big box retailers and Cates says he prefers to work with stores that can tell Alegria’s comfort and fit story, which is based on its footbed.



What’s in a name?

How did a Taiwanese company end up with a Spanish name? And how do you pronounce it? Alegria is pronounced AL-EGG-REE-UH, a phrasing that president Scott Cates says confuses even some of the brand’s loyal consumers. “I’ll hear them in the stores debating how to pronounce it,” he says. “It’s funny and has helped build our mystique.” To set the record straight, the brand’s name comes from the name of the brand’s first designer, Allegra. “We tried for that name, but it turned out that there was an allergy medicine by the same name.” The name was altered to Alegria, which the company says translates to “joy and happiness” in Spanish. “We have butterflies on our outsoles, so it’s a good fit,” Cates says.



Colorful style has helped drive the success of the Alegria brand.

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THE BOOT BOOK

FLEXING THEIR TOES

WORK BOOTS CHANNEL THEIR INNER SNEAKERS

BY NANCY A. RUHLING

To understand the evolutionary road that today's work boots are walking, one need do nothing more than examine Cat Footwear's Expedient with Nano Toe. Classified as an industrial work shoe, it looks like a sneaker (it has a cool yellow-orange color and slim silhouette), performs like an athlete (it's 40 percent lighter than a traditional steel-toe style), works like a pro (it's slip-resistant and meets electrical-hazard safety standards) and plays equally well during the workweek and on weekends (it's designed for general contractors, warehouse workers, deliverymen and drivers for wear on and off the job).

THE BOOT BOOK

For several seasons, traditional work boots have been evolving, remaking themselves as fashionable athletic-inspired workhorses in tandem with the trend toward athleisure, and the Expedient represents the future where many shoe-style “boots” are replacing traditional work boots.

The Expedient may be a bit ahead of its time, but take a look at Wolverine’s Jetstream, a light industrial safety-toe work shoe with different styles for men and women that would be right at home on the trail or in the sports arena.

“The Jetstream is one of the styles of safety-toe athletic shoes we are introducing,”

says Kelly Redinger, marketing director for Wolverine. “These shoes feel so light and comfortable you’ll forget you’re wearing a safety toe.”

Now compare these with Georgia Boot’s new Amplitude, which still retains a lot of its traditional work-boot DNA in a rebooted form.

Classified as a work hiker, it has the lightweight sporty styling and feel of an athletic shoe that workers want to wear for work and play and everything in between. With its composite toe, shock-absorbing AMP Memory Foam insole and Ergo-Fit Safety Toe that follows the contours of the foot, it comforts and cradles, making short shrift

of the long shift.

“The Amplitude collection is designed to fit the needs of a younger workforce that is looking for the same grit and endurance of their grandfather’s work boots but with a sleeker, more agile feel,” says Kasey LaCourse, associate designer/developer at Georgia Boot.

The work boots that are on the job today defy classification, by design. Indeed, more often than not they are branding themselves as “crossovers” such as Kamik’s Griffon, which looks like a traditional work boot yet defines itself as casual footwear that’s stylish and rugged enough for winter.

**THEY ARE CONVERTING
THEMSELVES INTO
HIGH-TECH BEASTS
THAT ARE GOING
HEAVY DUTY ON THE
LIGHT-WORK LOOK.**



Wolverine's Jetstream, \$90 to \$95

Cat Footwear's Expedient
with Nano Toe, \$124

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Another crossover, Timberland's Euro Hiker Mid Brogue, remakes the brand's 1990's original with two-tone styling, sleek lines, white tennis-shoe outsoles and timeless brogue details that fuse athletic, outdoor and streetwear styles.

And Sporto's Dena and Defrost styles, all-weather, all-season crossovers, pair the best of the brand's past – full-rubber boot vulcanization – with the best of today — Vibram's IceTrek Traction Bottom.

Given that the new generation of workers grew up snuggling their toes in sneakers, it's no surprise that the new work boot collections are not only taking their cues from

them, but also are converting themselves into high-tech beasts that are going heavy duty on the light-work look.

So pervasive is the athleisure influence that Oliver Bootmakers, which has been making traditional work and safety boots for more than 125 years, is entering the lifestyle-inspired safety shoe market.

Its Spring 2017 collection, the Oliver Series, features lightweight, low-cut styles that are, according to Sean O'Brien, VP and general manager, Honeywell Industrial Safety, "armed with all the safety features of a classic work boot."

This new breed of boots is making a name

for itself by giving equal weight to comfort, technology and fashion.

"Lightweight yet strong materials are being used for safety toes and flexible materials are being used for puncture-resistant plating material," says Don Colbert, executive vice president of sales for Avenger Work and Nautilus.

Avenger's A7546, for instance, is a heavy-duty composite-toe work boot that is one-third lighter than previous styles yet still meets stringent safety standards.

Colbert points out that light-duty work boots like Nautilus' N2421 are following in the footsteps of athletic shoes.

BRANDS HAVE BEGUN EXPERIMENTING WITH ATHLETIC-STYLE MESHES AND HIGH-ABRASION BREATHABLE MATERIALS NOT ONLY TO CATER TO A YOUNGER WEARER BUT ALSO TO FIND LESS COSTLY ALTERNATIVES TO LEATHER.



Nautilus Safety Footwear's
N2421, \$119.99

Oliver Bootmakers' Athletic
Series OL2500, \$110



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Marking Vibram's first foray into the traditional duck boot category, this partnership is revolutionary on many fronts with the IceTrek outsole technology making the collection the most technically sound, gripping duck boots ever built.

sporto.com



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“Driven by the athletic industry, safety athletics are incorporating mesh uppers with TPU overlays in the design, lightweight carbon nano-fiber composite toes that meet ASTM safety standards and outsoles designed for and made with materials to make them super slip-resistant,” he says.

Brands have begun experimenting with athletic-style meshes and high-abrasion breathable materials not only to cater to a younger wearer but also to find less costly alternatives to leather.

“I’ve seen a lot of work boots being influenced by the hiking/outdoor market,” says LaCourse. “Not only are hiker silhouettes

being used, but also outdoor/athletic construction methods. More and more brands are developing cemented/strobel construction boots with thick EVA midsoles, mainly to improve the comfort, weight and flexibility of the boot. Brands have begun to use athletic lasts instead of traditional work boot lasts, which gives a more sporty look and improves comfort.”

Keen Utility’s Davenport Mid WP is a prime example of a sneaker on steroids. Metal-free with a wide toe box and asymmetrical composite toes, it fits like a work boot but feels like a hiker. Its dual nature is denoted by the color accent panels on its waterproof

Nubuck leather and polyurethane-coated split-suede upper.

And Thorogood Shoes’ Omni, which is classified as a work/outdoor crossover, is a kick-ass worker that has the all-terrain chic look of a hiker.

“We use the same state-of-the-art shoemaking technology in our military footwear,” says Richard DiFalco, VP-industrial sales.

Advances in footwear materials and construction have allowed brands to cut the weight without decreasing safety.

“At Rocky, we’re working extensively with rubber and EVA molding technology,

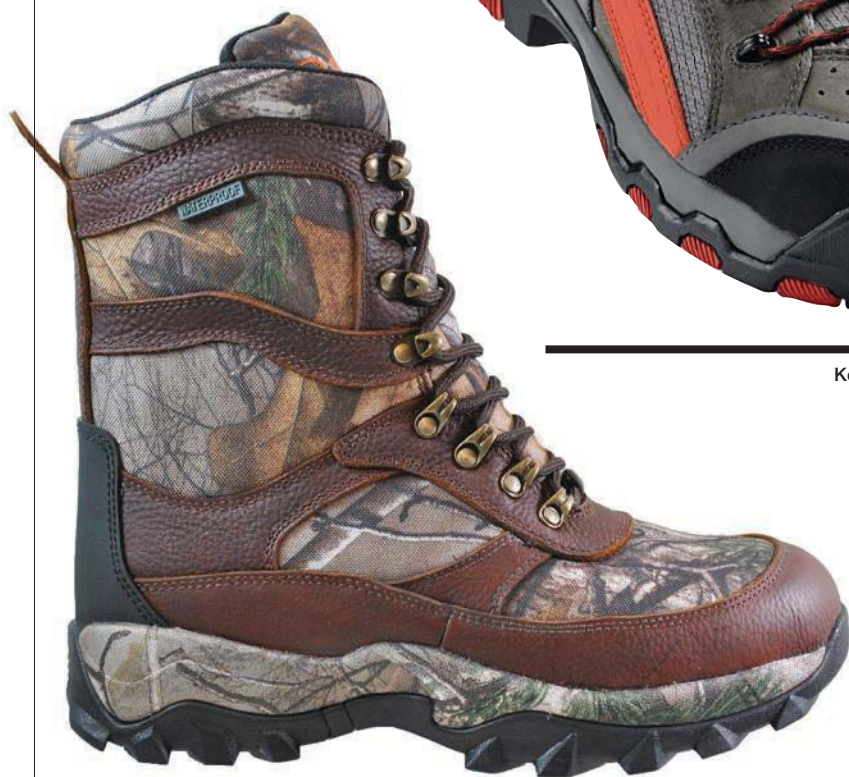
THIS NEW BREED OF BOOTS IS MAKING A NAME FOR ITSELF BY GIVING EQUAL WEIGHT TO COMFORT, TECHNOLOGY AND FASHION.



Keen Utility's Davenport Mid WP, \$180



Timberland's Euro Hiker Mid Brogue, \$175



Donner Mountain's Crestmont, \$89.95



Sporto's Defrost, \$119.99

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which enables us to create lightweight, comfortable and durable boots,” says Andrew Burleigh, senior designer/developer, Rocky Work & Western.

Rocky’s Mobilwelt, new for Spring 2017, features an extra-wide toe box, a composite toe and removable polyurethane footbed.

Thorogood Shoes is using direct-inject manufacturing processes to create outsoles that are slim and trim.

“Our recent investment in state-of-the-art machinery allows us to manufacture these direct-injected styles in our U.S. factories in Wisconsin,” DiFalco says. “This type of footwear was previously produced overseas.”

Even tactical boots, which have remained true traditional, are showing they’ve got game.

Reebok’s Strikepoint line of 8-inch and 6-inch military boots is power-packed with elite fitness technology that includes a heat-activated mid-foot wrap for a custom fit with

**EVEN TACTICAL BOOTS, WHICH HAVE
REMAINED TRUE TRADITIONALS, ARE
SHOWING THEY’VE GOT GAME.**



Reebok’s Strikepoint,
\$138 to \$148

no break-in period; a rebound-foam lightweight cushioned midsole; a FootFuel Footbed for all-day-on-the-feet comfort; a rope guard for climbing; odor-eating nanoparticles; and a blister-buster system.

“We wanted to develop a truly cross-functional boot, born out of fitness training and engineered for the front lines,” says John Duvic, corporate VP of Warson Brands, the official licensee of Reebok military footwear.

Now that work boots have stepped up as agile as athletes into their comfort zone of fashion and function, what’s next?

Courtney Frank, marketing manager Cat Footwear, foresees a further fusion of high fashion and high technology where work boots track the wearer’s distance, calories burned and stride length.

Even if that happens, O’Brien says, “there will always be room in the category for the traditional, wheat work boot.” ●



Bates' Cobra 8-inch Hot Weather Boot, \$149.95

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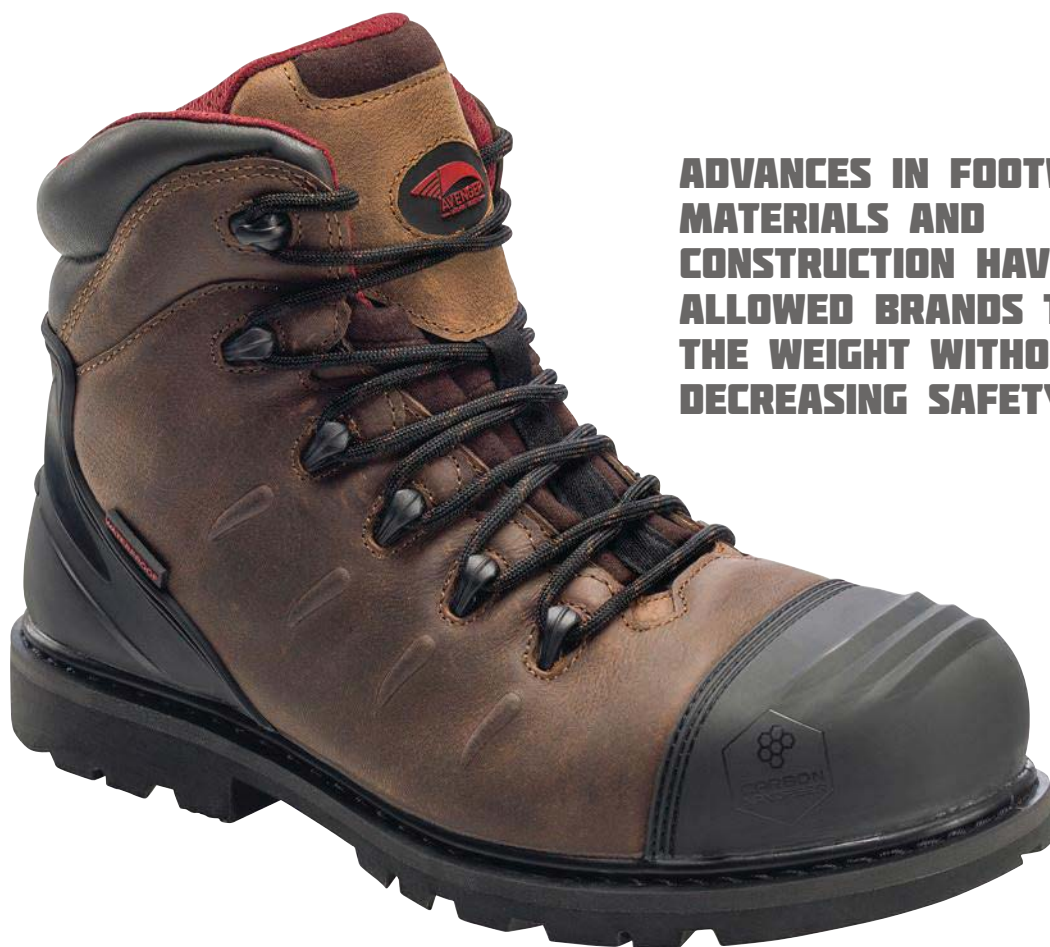


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Georgia Boot's Amplitude, \$149.99 to \$159.99



Avenger Work Boots' A7546, \$135.99



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BY DESIGN. INDEED,
MORE OFTEN
THAN NOT, THEY
ARE BRANDING
THEMSELVES AS
“CROSSOVERS.”**



Rocky's Mobilwelt, \$159.99



Thorogood Shoes' Omni, \$229.99



Kamik's Griffon, \$100



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Bogs' Bozeman Tall, \$150

Hunter's Original Refined Mid Wedge Cuff, \$225

RUBBER BOOTS ARE WALKING ON WATER AND OUT OF THE RAIN

Call it the season of the rubber boot reboot. Traditionally worn for water or rain work, this no-frills footwear is undergoing a transformation that is placing it front and center in the chic closet. The new styles are lighter, brighter and more comfortable, yet every bit as practical as their black utilitarian predecessors.

"We are seeing rubber boots coming in a multitude of colors, print and styles," says Sean O'Brien, VP and general manager of Xtratuf and The Original Muck Boot Company. "At Muck, we are introducing nautical prints, bright color pops and slimming silhouettes. At Xtratuf, we were able to reduce weight in the Deck

Boot Collection while maintaining the durability that anglers are looking for from us as a brand."

Brandy McCarty, senior VP-global brand sales and strategy for Khombu/The Eastman Group, attributes the rubber boot's popularity in and out of the rain to its fusion of fashion and function.

"It is largely driven by the resurgence of the traditional duck boot as a fashion statement," he says. "Extreme weather conditions across the country are affecting our consumers and we are providing a solution that not only fits our consumer's needs, but also provides them a boot with increased functionality and looks great."

Khombu's Men's Coyote is a prime example. It pairs red fashion pinstriping on its gum-rubber foxing with twin gores, a back tab pull-on and the brand's trademarked K-Comfort insoles.

And, he adds, on the technology side, each of the brands features a temperature-regulating liner on the inside that wicks moisture and cools simultaneously.

Propelled by the athleisure trend, rubber boot designs are functional, durable and simplistic.

"There's a drive to use less materials to reduce waste," says David Cook, Bogs marketing director. "The Bozeman, which features Bogs new seamless construction technology, is a breakthrough in this category that is helping achieve more sustainable practices."

He points out that "technology and design don't have to be separate. Bogs core technologies – nonslip outsoles, Rebound cushioning and DuraFresh biotechnology – are perfect examples of technology that has been integrated seamlessly into every shoe from lifestyle, waterproof leather boots to rubber work boots."

The new generation of rubber boots, McCarty says, is merely the tip of the iceberg.

"More brands are definitely entering the arena to meet the fashion trend," he says. "However, Khombu is positioned to provide outdoor technical features to go along with the fashion trend." ●



Joules' Kelly Wellies Gloss, \$67.95



Khombu's Men's Coyote, \$69.99

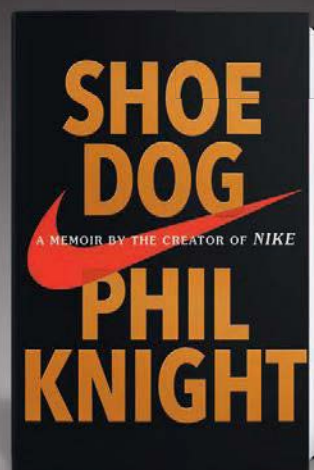
Xtratuf's Kryptek Yeti Ankle, \$90

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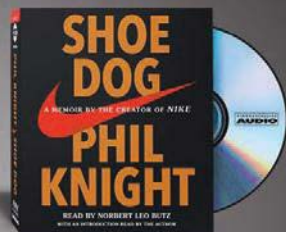
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