

FOOTWEAR INSIGHT[®]

TRENDS, PERSPECTIVE & ANALYSIS • A FORMULA4 MEDIA PUBLICATION



THE BOOT BOOK

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JANUARY 16

20

FOOT LOCKER Q&A

Dick Johnson, the president and CEO of Foot Locker, gives us an inside look at the company's strategy.

24

CASUAL COOL

Footwear Insight offers up three key trends to watch in the men's casual footwear category for Fall 2016.

30

BOOT BOOK

Work boots have morphed into high-tech performers that work both on the job or off the clock.

42

RACK ROOM

The retail powerhouse has a billion dollar business, and there's still plenty of room for growth.

48

TONAL TRENDS

Brands are kicking up the color a notch in leather and suede offerings. Subtle, solid tones gain steam.

50

LINES WE LIKE

Going outside the box with running footwear brands that are offering up styles with unique twists.

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SHOWING SOME RESOLVE

RECENTLY WHILE DRIVING IN RUSH HOUR A TRUCK CUT ME OFF BY SWERVING ACROSS three lanes of traffic and making a left hand turn from the right hand lane. I reacted with some colorful language and immediately felt horrible as my teenage daughter was sitting in the passenger seat within full earshot.

So with all of you as my witnesses, I offer my number one resolution for 2016: I am going to work hard to watch my language, especially when I'm driving and especially when my children are present.

A few retailers have been kind enough to tell me their resolutions, which are way more ambitious than mine. I am happy to share them with you.

Get my staff to engage: One of the top pet peeves in retail today is walking into a store and seeing sales associates playing with their phones. This is especially prevalent with younger associates. It sends a terrible message to customers who are most likely in your stores because they want some human contact. If they wanted a cold technical shopping experience they could do that online. So make everyone put away their phones and look people in the eye. For your young staffers, you're providing valuable life training, too. This resolution should also apply to vendors at all the January trade shows. It's a major turn-off to walk by a

**If you take
10 minutes a day
to educate your
staffers, it will be
time well spent.**

trade show booth and see staffers playing with their phones rather than engaging with the folks walking by. Have a rule that says everyone needs to look up, or institute a "fine" every time someone looks at their phone. You'll cover your booth costs.

Experiment: Set aside a small percentage of your budget for "experimental" buys. Try a new brand or category. Stores are a sea of sameness. Don't look like everyone else and don't offer what's readily available online. Customers are buying what they don't have in their closets. Show them that.

Educate: I spent a day with a top shoe exec recently who got his start selling children's shoes. He gave an educational pitch on why toddlers need good shoes. It was informative, passionate and effective. If you take 10 minutes a day to educate your staffers, it will be time well spent. Why is this new line in the mix? Why does this shoe cost 10 percent more than the one that looks just like it? And why is it worth the difference? All of these are small conversations that can make a difference.

Play both sides of the ball: I spoke with a retailer who attended two educational conferences this fall in a two week period: The National Shoe Retailers Association's Leadership Conference in Charleston and The Running Event Conference in Austin (owned by Formula4 Media, publishers of this magazine). His analysis was succinct. "The running stores have so much passion, it's really incredible," he told me. "I wish the shoe store owners had half the passion that they did." The flip side of that conversation? "The shoe store guys are very focused on business performance and especially margins. I'm worried that the run store owners are not getting enough margin on their shoe sales and that is going to make it difficult for them to offer the high levels of service that make them successful and make money in general." His resolution for 2016 may be the most ambitious of all: to run his business with the passion of the running store owners and the precision and attention to detail of his brethren in the comfort shoe business.

It's a good time to be ambitious. I swear by it. ●

Mark

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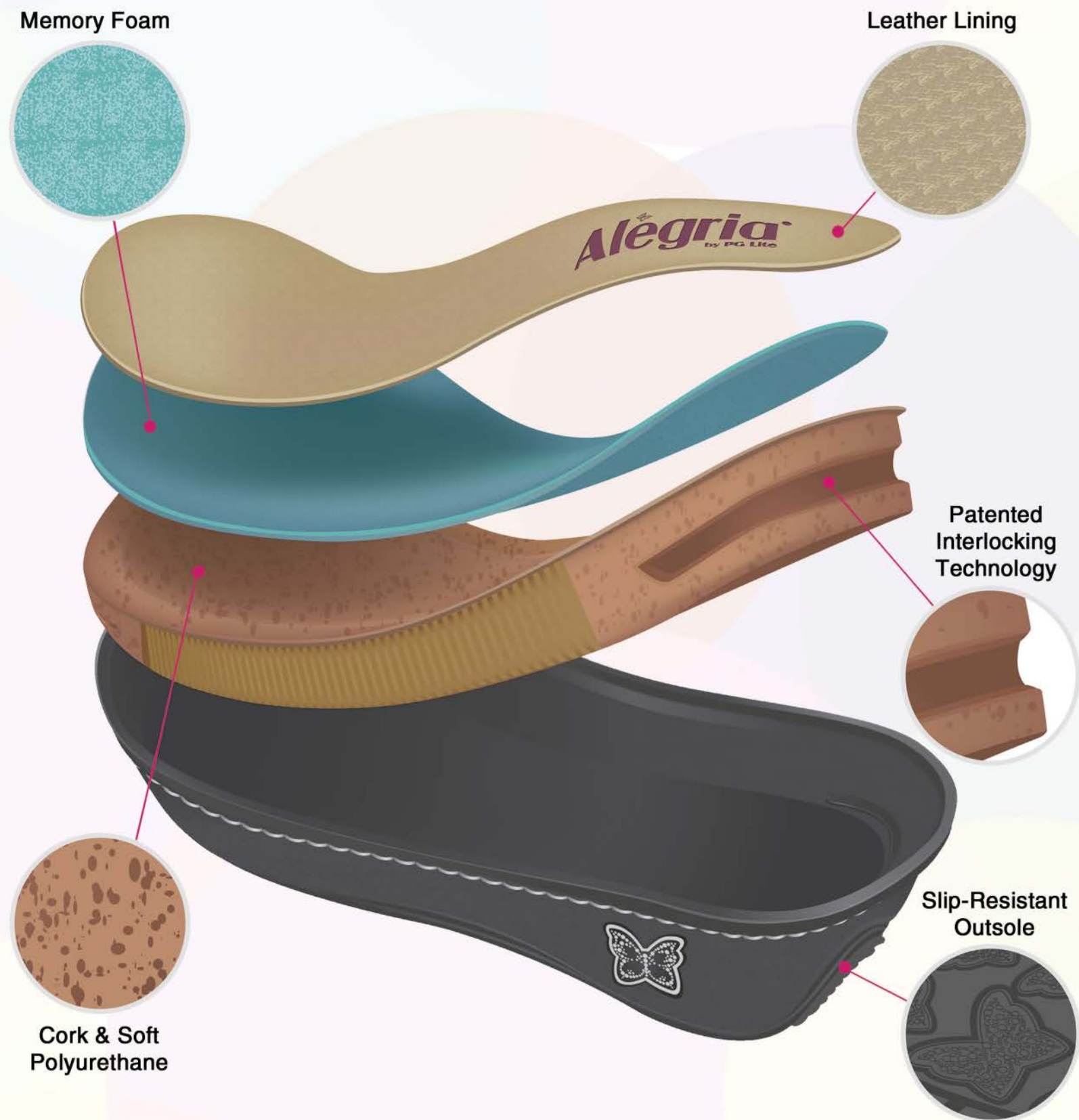
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RUNNING'S BEST

Red Coyote Named Running Store of the Year



Photo: Jana Bratum

Oklahoma City's Red Coyote Running and Fitness was named the 2015 Running Store of the Year. The presentation took place at The Running Event trade show in Austin, TX, last month. The store, started in 2010 by Jon and Burke Beck, earned a spot on the prestigious 50 Best Running Stores of America list for the fifth time and was named a finalist for the third time. The program is co-organized annually by *Competitor* and *Running Insight* magazine.

"Jon, Burke and the entire staff at Red Coyote Running and Fitness exude passion for the local running community and have strived to help people change their lives, no matter what level of runner they might be," said *Competitor* editor-in-chief Brian Metzler. "This award is a tribute to the commitment they bring to the Oklahoma City running community."

The 5500-square-foot store is bright, clean, well-merchandised and has developed several wildly successful running programs, including its Pack Pint Runs, co-sponsored by a local brewery and often benefitting a good cause, and its Newbie Running Program that has attracted hundreds of beginner 5K runners since its implementation.

"When Burke and I met, we knew we shared a love for the sport of running," Jon Beck said. "We both loved helping people at our previous positions at the stores we started at and we really wanted to continue helping people achieve their goals. No day is ever the same, but we come in with the common goal of wanting to help make a healthier community."

The Becks credited their entire staff of 22 people for the success they have achieved and for helping create a family atmosphere within the store.

"The best part of going to work every day is knowing we're changing people's lives," Burke Beck added. "I remember when I saw someone wearing one of our shirts for the first time and when I started to see our stickers around town. I was so excited that people were identifying with what we are doing."

The store's name was inspired by the owners' runner dog Pancho, who resembles a red coyote.

"Over a beer on our first date, Jon and I talked about how we would both love to own a running store someday," Burke Beck said. In 2010, they moved back to Oklahoma City, Burke's hometown, to open Red Coyote. ●

Reprinted from www.competitor.com

INDUSTRY HONORS

IRRA Gives Brooks and Feetures! Vendor Awards



Photo: Frank James

ASICS Nimbus Wins Shoe of the Year

The Independent Running Retailers' Association named Brooks and Feetures! as its vendors of the Year for 2015. The IRRA named the ASICS GEL-Nimbus 17 as Shoe of the Year.

Brooks won Vendor of the Year honors for the third consecutive year, winning out over the other nominees: Saucony and New Balance. The award is voted upon by the IRRA retail members based on the following criteria.

- Product Consistency and Marketing Integration.
- Commitment to Independent Specialty Running Channel.
- Customer Service Excellence and Initiatives.
- Specialty Running Marketing and Community Initiatives.

The same criteria was used in the Non-Footwear Vendor of the Year Award where Feetures! won out over Nathan and Trigger Point.

For the Shoe of the Year award, the ASICS GEL-Nimbus 17 won out over The Saucony Guide and The NB860 V6. The criteria for Shoe of the Year were:

- A new product, a consistently dependable product, or significantly improved product from the previous year
- Competes, where it didn't a year ago, in its category or within the spectrum of its category.
- Has consistently good sell-through.
- Has a Consistent Replenishment Program (in-stock/quick delivery).
- Profitable to the retailer.

The awards were presented at The Running Event in December in Austin, TX.

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AWARDS

Alan Miklofsky Named NSRA Retailer of the Year



The National Shoe Retailers Association (NSRA) honored Alan Miklofsky as its 2015 Retailer of the Year during NSRA's Annual Leadership Conference.

Miklofsky, who has been in the shoe industry since 1977, owns and operates five stores in Tucson, AZ, under the banners Alan's Shoe House and New Balance Tucson (which employ 50 people). As the first individual to register "shoes.com" in 1994, Miklofsky has been at the forefront of Internet shoe retailing. His footwear experience also includes a stint as vice president of The Walking Company and as president of Oasis Comfort, then the U.S. distributor of Beautifeel.

First elected to NSRA's Board of Directors in 1993, Miklofsky served the association on the Executive, Education, Technology and Member Services committees. He later served as chairman of NSRA's annual conference and as chairman of the Finance Committee, the Information Resources Committee and the By-Law Revision Committee before being elected vice chairman of the Board. He became chairman of NSRA's Board of Directors in 2009, a position he held for two

years. As one of NSRA's active past chairmen, he continues to serve the association in a variety of ways.

In presenting the award, Maurice Breton, CEO/owner of Comfort One Shoes, Manassas, VA, thanked Miklofsky for his many contributions not just to NSRA but also to fellow independent footwear retailers and his home city of Tucson. In accepting the award, Miklofsky thanked his wife, Annette, for working beside him all these years, as well as thanking his fellow NSRA independent retailers as role models in business.

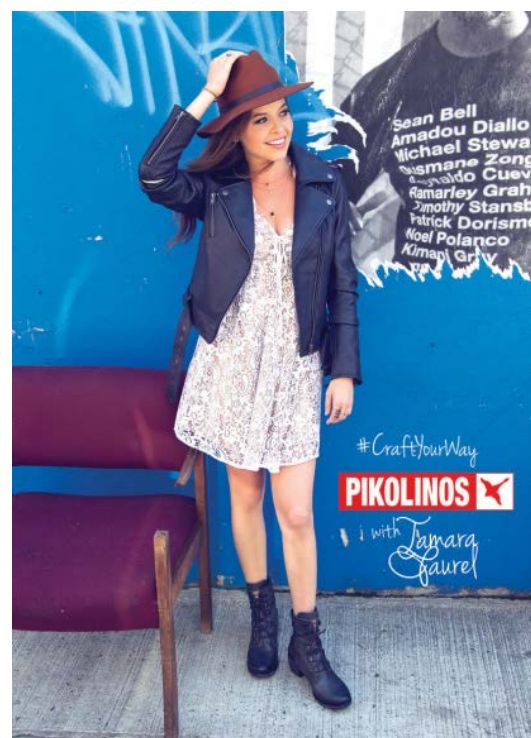
Vendor Awards

The NSRA named Birkenstock USA and Vionic Group as its Vendors of the Year for 2015.

"Vendors of the Year are companies held in high esteem by independent retailers, both for the integrity of their business practices and for their passion and long-term commitment to the betterment of the independent footwear channel," said NSRA president Chuck Schuyler. "It is with great pleasure that NSRA salutes both Birkenstock and Vionic — they are great to do business with and their employees are some of the most dedicated in the industry." ●

CAMPAIGN

Pikolinos Crafts an Artistic Message



Pikolinos is featuring singer-songwriter Tamara Laurel as part of its new #CraftYourWay campaign. Pikolinos' #CraftYourWay campaign is following independent musicians, photographers and chefs on their paths to achieve their dreams and goals. Laurel is a folksinger who leans toward alternative country and she recently released her first collection of music, "Runaway." Brand execs say Pikolinos fits perfectly with the singer's self-proclaimed bohemian, effortless take on fashion while she's at home or on tour. Laurel says her style is much like her music: "Whatever comes easy, natural, and feels good." ●



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Can Geox Fulfill its Potential?



Geox Nebula shoes for men; the brand's new chief, Tracy Smith, sees potential for growth in the U.S.

Since entering the American market more than 15 years ago, Geox has tried a number of top executives and several ambitious plans for becoming a major player in the U.S.

To date, none of those have panned out. But Tracy Smith says this time will be different. Smith joined Geox in February 2015 from Cole Haan. He brings 18 years of experience and an optimistic point of view to Geox, which is a \$1 billion brand in the global market, despite struggling in the United States.

"This feels like familiar territory," says Smith, who sees many parallels between Geox and Cole Haan. "Geox has a proprietary technology at an affordable price," he says. "That translates to untapped potential."

Smith says he was attracted to Geox by its heritage and his belief that the story hasn't been adequately told in the U.S. The original Geox Breathing Shoe was created when founder Mario Moretti Polegato was hiking in the desert while representing Italian wine at a trade show in Reno. During his hike, Polegato grew irritated at the excessive heat generated by his rubber soles and pierced them with a knife to cool his feet.

When he returned home, Polegato pitched his "breathing shoe" idea to several Italian companies, who didn't see the potential. Polegato obtained several patents on the idea and eventually began making the shoes on his own, creating a brand name by combining the word "Geo" (Greek for Earth) and the letter X symbolizing the brand's technology.

The Geox story has played well in Italy and other European countries, where the brand establishes itself in the kids' category and then expands into women's and men's. (Indeed the brand's global business is 33 percent men's, 33 percent women's and 33 percent kids, according to Smith). That model hasn't translated in the U.S., where it has had a few hits, but has lacked consistency in its product and business vision.

"We've had some talented people work for the brand in America, but the company didn't understand the U.S. business model. We didn't understand the seasonal timing, how the trade shows worked over here, the delivery cycles and how important inventory replenishment is," Smith tells *Footwear Insight*.

Giorgio Presca, who has been CEO of Geox since late 2012, is an experienced brand executive who has run several leading denim labels including

a stint at Citizens of Humanity in Los Angeles. Smith says Presca understands the American business model and is committed to building an organization that can achieve sustainable success.

Geox's business in the U.S. is 40 percent women's, 28 percent men's and 31 percent kids. The brand has 14 stores, 10 brand stores and four outlets. Company-owned retail is not a major agenda item for the near future. "We will look for select opportunities in the major tourist destination cities across the country to take advantage of our higher brand awareness among European tourists, but we will focus primarily on expanding our wholesale distribution with key partners," says Smith.

Not surprisingly, Smith sees a huge opportunity in the men's category. "It's a men's time right now," he says. "There was a time not long ago when casual Friday was as wild as it got. But now men are open to colors, especially in their footwear and accessories, and that's breathing life into the business."

Smith says the uptick in the men's footwear business is at the front end of a cycle. "There are men who lead the trend and then others follow."

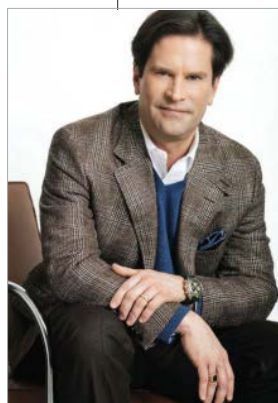
In both the men's and women's category, Smith sees Geox positioned as a combination of "wellness, comfort and contemporary design." He believes the bulk of the company's business will be in footwear that is "more casual and sport inspired."

In fact Smith is hoping that the Nebula, first introduced as a soft launch for Fall 2014, is a sign of what's to come for the brand. The shoe crosses over Spring to Fall and from casual athletic to a slightly dressier silhouette. It also has enough technology to justify a \$180 retail price point.

The shoes boast a lightweight, flexible upper that features a hot-bonded construction with no stitching, in keeping with the sports profile of the sole. The shoes are also water-resistant and feature heat-regulating properties like the exclusive Inner Breathing system, which uses Net Breathing technology to ensure high levels of breathability thanks to perforations in critical areas of the sole.

Geox sold 52,000 pairs globally during that first season, and Smith says it's rapidly gaining momentum.

For Spring/Summer 2016, more than 200,000 pairs have already been booked globally by retailers thus far and the shoe is showing signs of being the brand's first big hit in America. ●



The poster is framed by a lush tropical border. At the top left is a large green monstera leaf. At the top right are white and pink orchids. On the left side, there are palm fronds and a large green leaf. On the right side, there are more palm fronds. At the bottom left is a red hibiscus flower. At the bottom right is a pink orchid. The background of the central text area is a dark blue pattern of small white flowers.

THE
AGENDA
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HOSIERY

Sock Brands Turn Up the Volume



1. Point6 Sprinter mini-crew, \$16.95; 2. Feetures! Elite Max Cushion, \$15.99; 3. Drymax Hyper Thin Mini Crew Running Sock, \$11.50; 4. Darn Tough Chevrons, MSRP \$20; 5. SecondWind Graduated Compression Sock, \$34.99; 6. Stance Fusion Run Star Wars Collection, \$22; 7. Fox River's AXT Collection, \$13.99; 8. Under Armour UA Drive Basketball Crew, \$17.99; 9. Smartwool's New PhD Outdoor Mountaineer, \$34.95; 10. Wigwams Fireside, \$15; 11. Sof Sole Fireside Indoor Cozy Socks, \$9.99-12.99.

By Nancy A. Ruhling

With the new year comes a whole new flock of socks that are 24/7 performance artists.

High-tech and high-style, they are every bit as well equipped and comfy as the shoes they walk and run in.

Drymax's Hyper Thin Mini Crew Running Sock, \$11.50, is billed as the "world's lightest running sock." Made in the U.S.A., it has the brand's race-proven dual-layer sweat-removing system whose inner Drymax layer is super hydrophobic: When the foot moves, it lifts the moisture to the outer wicking layer.

Feetures! Elite Max Cushion, \$15.99, combines technical fit with a comfortable feel. It features patented Sock-Lock technology, which provides an anatomical fit, with an incredibly spun-fiber technology for padding and comfort.

Fox River's AXT Collection is comprehensive: It has 13 styles and offers 50 options from lightweight ankle to heavyweight boot. The lightweight merino socks, \$12.99 to \$13.99, are designed to walk from path to pavement. The brand's URfit system provides arch support and memory-knit construction; Wick Dry technology keeps feet dry; a reinforced toe and heel for comfort and durability.

Point6's Sprinter, a merino wool, extra-light mini-crew, features ventilation panels, seamless toe closures and deep heel pockets and is engineered to keep feet cool and dry. Made in the U.S.A., it comes with a lifetime guarantee and retails for \$16.95.

Smartwool's New PhD Outdoor Mountaineer, collaboration with athlete Conrad Anker, features the brand's Industractawool technology, a new

TRENDQUOTES

MARGARET NEWHARD, DIRECTOR OF PRODUCT MANAGEMENT, WIGWAM

"The market is saturated with a 'sea of same' right now, and Wigwam Classics really stand out to the retailer and the consumer. The product line is generating a great deal of excitement because of its visual appeal and the authentic story behind the Wigwam brand."

JOHN LESSARD, PRESIDENT OF FOX RIVER

"People want to wear a technical product in their everyday life because they know a better fitting sock provides more support and comfort. Plus, active lifestyles lead consumers to walk, jog or cycle within their everyday lives. But they still want the style and color to coordinate with their everyday apparel."

LAURA SICILIANO, DIRECTOR OF BRAND DEVELOPMENT, UNDER ARMOUR

"There is an overall feeling of less is more on fashion features in socks. Athletes are favoring subtle designs and core colors. As footwear makes a big statement on field and court, socks complement but do not distract."

RUSSELL NADEL, DIRECTOR-RUNNING AT STANCE

"In 2016, we will be seeing more sophisticated designs utilizing specialized yarns as well as designs that will enhance the current trends of footwear and apparel. Stance has taken its cutting-edge capabilities and matched them with state-of-the-art proprietary performance materials to create a unique product in the running and training world."

BOB MACGILLIVRAY, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, DRYMAX

"Consumers will continue to educate themselves and truly understand the difference between a fashion product and a technical sock. The fad designer sock and its limited shelf life will give away to socks that actually perform for the customer as well as long term for the retailer. Specialty retailers will seek out alternatives to existing wicking socks; buyers are ready to embrace a truly different technology."

JOE GAITHER, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING, FEETURES!

"Runners and other athletes want more design and color than ever, but they also want performance socks that are comfortable. Performance socks can't just perform any more. They have to be comfortable and stylish enough to wear all day long."



merino-based durability system that builds a four-part system into a single sock by targeting specific areas. The made-in-America sock, \$34.95, carries Anker's emoji symbol of a Himalayan skyline at its top and also has a bulk-free instep, two integrated mesh zones for venting and a 20 to 30 mmHG compression heel cup, making it suited for the ski, outdoor, run and mountaineering markets.

SecondWind's Graduated Compression Sock, \$34.99, is a knee high loaded with technical features. Its high-performance microfiber nylon wicks moisture, adds softness and durability. The Y heel gore, seam-free toe, arch support and thick double-welt turned top add comfort to the contoured foot. The light strategic cushioning zones shock absorption, and the mesh venting increases breathability.

Stance's Fusion Run Star Wars Collection, \$22, is a double feature: The 200-needle compression crews pair cinematic good looks with high-tech force-awakening features, including anatomical venting and air-channel cushioning.

Under Armour's UA Drive Basketball Crew and UA Swarm Football Crew, \$16.99 to \$17.99, are the brand's elite players. They have moisture-wicking fibers, top-of-the-foot mesh venting, medial compression arch support, cushion zones with channel ventilation, ergonomic contouring, seamless toes and anti-bacteria technology.

Wigwam's Fireside, from the brand's Classic Collection, is a fashion-forward, comfortable sock that's equally at home at home or out on the town. Its timeless, textured style is derived from the archives of the brand, which has more than 110 years of knitting experience. It retails for \$15. ●

see all the new classics at: wigwam.com/fall16



Fireside
EST|2016



NEW COLLECTIONS

New Children in the Family at LJP



Limited Too Fierce



Limited Too Hashtag



Ben Sherman Earl



Ben Sherman Syd

In 2016, LJP will begin shipping shoes from its two newest children's brands, Ben Sherman kids and Limited Too. Both of these collections will be produced under licensing agreements and will add to LJP's portfolio of kids' brands, which includes Nine West Kids and BareTraps.

The Limited Too collection targets tween girls. The Limited Too trademark is managed by Bluestar Alliance, which describes the brand's consumer as "a fashionable, active, trendy, confident, social, energetic girl who speaks her own voice."

"Our goal for the new collection is to deliver the same glam, girly, fun, glitzy excitement which the brand has come to represent," says Larry Paparo, president and CEO of LJP International. The collection will include sandals, dress, boots, athletic-inspired funky sneakers and fuzzy colorful

slippers. They will reflect the heritage of the brand but will be reimagined for today's consumers, says Paparo.

The Ben Sherman collection will be LJP's "first solely boys brand," Paparo says, and will be produced under license from Marquee Brands, which owns the popular men's lifestyle brand. Paparo says the Ben Sherman Kids' collection will "offer preppy, casual, and dress options for boys to accompany the adult men's brand."

The line will include sneakers, oxfords, chukka boots, boots and moccasins for boys. "They will reflect the rich heritage of the brand, but will be focused on the youth styles of today," Paparo says.

LJP International also produces the Robert Graham footwear line, Bruno Magli men's and women's shoes, and Mootsies Tootsies for women. LJP is also the American distributor for CCILU footwear. ●

FASHION

Harley Revs Up the Black



Drakeswood, \$180



Tallsman, \$300

Inkwood, \$180

Tarrson, \$280

Harley-Davidson is riding the fashion circuit with its new collection of Black Label footwear.

Harley-Davidson Motor Co., ranked number six in CoreBrand's Top 10 Most Respected Corporate Brands in 2014, created its Black Label apparel and footwear lines to cater to a hip new generation that is more geared to bicycles than motorcycles. In 2016, it's expanding its Black Label footwear styles and for the first time is offering them through retail shoe stores.

"The footwear is part of Harley-Davidson Motor Co.'s global strategic initiative to attract a younger customer," says Chris Hayes, director of sales

for Harley-Davidson Footwear.

"It coordinates with the brand's Black Label apparel and new urban-oriented motorcycles. The footwear is made to be more of a fashion item than a motorcycle riding boot."

The footwear collection features four boot and sneaker styles for women along with four men's styles. "In the past, there were only one to two styles and they were sold exclusively through Harley-Davidson dealers," Hayes, who points out that more than 50 percent of sales are to women. "It's totally about fashion for them," he says. "The new, expanded Black Label collection is a cool opportunity for shoe retailers to get involved." ●



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February 16-18, 2016

Azami

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Pushing For More

Q&A with Foot Locker's Dick Johnson

By Jennifer Ernst Beaudry

Dick Johnson is looking ahead. Johnson, who celebrated a year as president and CEO of athletic retail powerhouse Foot Locker on December 1, has had a lot to celebrate. Under his tenure, the New York-based firm has continued the hot streak it had enjoyed under former CEO Ken Hicks, seeing net income, comps and sales all steadily rise. Driven by the red-hot athletic market and strength across the U.S. and globally in the third quarter ended Oct. 31, sales in all banners rose 3.6 percent to \$1.79 billion from \$1.73 billion, and same-store sales grew almost 8.7 percent, putting the retailer up 3.1 percent in sales for the year to reach \$5.4 billion. But the firm – which comprises the Foot Locker, Footaction, Lady Foot Locker, Six:02, Kids Foot Locker, Champs Sports and Runners Point and Sidestep banners – isn't resting on its laurels.

In March, the retailer updated its 2020 strategic objectives, including expanding its presence in Europe, continuing to build apparel and digital and aggressively growing its

women's business in the process of taking annual sales to \$10 billion from \$7.1 billion in 2014.

Mitch Kummetz, senior analyst at B. Riley and Co., says the company has proven itself to be adept at managing the sometimes-volatile athletic business

"They've implemented systems in the past couple of years for planning, allocation and inventory management to get the right product in the right stores, which drives comps and minimizes markdowns, and their ability to be better merchandisers has shown there's flexibility in the model to benefit them when basketball is doing well but also when it slows down," he says. "And they've been doing remodels and more partner shops and doing a better job partnering with vendors so that they look their best and have the best products in their stores."

And Johnson is looking to continue to push the accelerator. The dot-com banners are poised to hit \$1 billion in sales this year, and under new SVP and CIO Pawan Verma, the firm's information tech infrastructure is a priority.

This spring the company will remodel and expand its flagship space on New York's 34th Street,

just down the street from its headquarters, and in 2017 it will open a showpiece store in Times Square, with both locations to include a beefed-up Six:02 presence, the first in Manhattan for the women's-only banner.

Store partnerships with vendor partners, like the Fall opening of the Flight 23 Jordan Brand and Footaction store in Chicago and the new Under Armour shop-in-shop The Armoury in Champs, are set to continue.

Dave Dombrow, SVP-design for footwear and accessories for Under Armour, says the relationship with Foot Locker has given the brand even deeper access to their target market of fashion-forward consumers and tastemakers. And as Under Armour puts a greater focus on the athletic women's space, he says, Foot Locker will play a critical role.

"As time has gone on, we've been working and collaborating even closer with Foot Locker over the past year," he says. "And with the women's business, we're partnering to make that something of power and substance."

But it hasn't been all smooth sailing.

Heading into the new year, the

"I want to be a resource and be available to them, but I want to **empower** the team."

Foot Locker, led by president and CEO Dick Johnson, has its foot on the accelerator.

industry – and Foot Locker with it – will be contending with some big issues. A shift away from high-margin marquee basketball product could put stress on margins as consumers gravitate to lower-priced running and retro models. Vendors, especially industry-dominating Nike, are working on aggressive direct-to-consumer sales plans of their own. And while everyone agrees that active lifestyle for women is a major opportunity, no one brand or retailer has been able to definitively crack the code to take advantage, even after several seasons of trying.

But Johnson maintains that he's not deterred.

Speaking to *Footwear Insight* during the brand's annual "Week of Greatness" holiday sneaker release spree, Johnson's predictions for the event could speak volumes for the business as a whole.

"We feel that the consumer votes," he says. "We're positioned well in the marketplace with great products, and we feel very energized. The things we can control are controlled. We're optimistic that shoppers will respond positively."

Here, Johnson talks about the retailer's next billion-dollar business, the hot running market and Foot Locker's global advantage.

Footwear Insight: You celebrated one year as CEO in December. What are you most proud of in those 12 months?

Dick Johnson: The consistency of the team. We had a change at the top and our team is so focused on the customer and driving the business that they haven't missed a beat. That's the quality of people we've got and the love of the game that they've got. My hat is really off to them.

How would you describe your leadership style?

I'm collaborative. I like to hear a bunch of points of view, to sit around a table and have broad discussions and laser in on the issues. When you are surrounded by a good group, you need to let them do their jobs. You provide steerage and coverage when you need to, but at the end of the day, they're the ones who make it happen. I want to be a resource and be available to them, but I



want to empower the team.

In your Q3 call with analysts in November, you noted higher growth in your running business than in basketball, historically the dominant category. Are you seeing a fashion shift?

There are some great basketball shoes right now. But the consumer has said, 'Maybe we're going to move over to lifestyle running, there are some lifestyle casual running shoes we like right now.' But that's not anything negative to basketball. We're seeing great growth in running and in basketball. We want to grow the sneaker culture with a relentless flow of great product — the customer ultimately decides they want to wear. Success in all categories is our objective.

What categories are critical for you?

Our product stool has four strong legs: basketball, which is especially strong in North America; running shoes, tech or lifestyle; and then our casual and seasonal product, canvas or boots. And getting our apparel strength to be on par with [footwear] gives us really strong category coverage.

When you talk about strong

running styles, are you referencing heritage models or some of the newer, lower-profile models?

It's a combination of both. There are things like certainly the Nike Roshe that's been very strong in the U.S., and the Nike Huarache, which has made a comeback, but also some of the Gel-Lyte styles we're doing with ASICS. It's about modern interpretations of running, that look and feel. Most of those shoes don't ever run a mile — but it's what the customer is comfortable wearing.

Does that hold true globally?

One of the things I'm not sure people realize is how important the running silhouette is in Western Europe. We're working hard to grow basketball there, and we know that consumer is there. But they're influenced by the game of soccer and the low-profile silhouette is really strong. There's a different feeling.

Do you see a lot of cross-pollination with your markets outside the U.S.?

Our merchants sit every Monday morning to talk about what's working in their geographies. One of our strengths is our point of view around our market. Trends happen much quicker today —

with social media and the Internet, kids can see a concert in Berlin tonight and they want whatever that person is wearing by tomorrow. That's where we bring a lot to bear with our global organization.

You introduced the women's-only Six:02 concept in 2012 but haven't yet aggressively rolled out the format. Do you consider that banner still in development?

We're working to get the footwear and assortment mix set and to have the right fashion and function mixed in — it's a difficult target. We have to make sure we're right: building stores is a big financial investment. But we're building an audience both online and in-store and I feel really good about the women's business. In the early half of the year the focus will be on the shops in our new flagship locations, and we will continue to work with the 30 existing stores to ramp up.

Almost every major athletic vendor and athletic retailer has said that targeting the women's active business is a priority — has that changed the landscape?

There's certainly a sense in the marketplace that she's not really satisfied with any of the options.

RETAILINTERVIEW

She knows what she wants, and she's a very discerning shopper. We certainly have got the desire and the ability to satisfy her — the one thing you notice about our industry is that everybody is talking about her. None of us has got it figured out, but we're all talking about it. She's a very important customer.

This fall, you opened a Chicago location of the Jordan brand-focused Flight 23 shop with Footaction to a lot of social media buzz. How has the reaction been to the space? The flagship store on State Street, if you haven't had a chance to check it out, is a fantastic store. The Footaction side has representation of all the great brands we work with, and a Nike Kicks lounge, which is dedicated to Nike Sportswear footwear and

"We want the experience for our customers to be as **frictionless** as possible — it's never going to be seamless, but we want it to be as engaging as possible."

dedicated wall and floor space for apparel, sometimes it's a buildout. It's about the best way possible to share vendor stories and create great, engaging and entertaining in-store spaces. Our global one is House of Hoops. There are 168 in the U.S., 15 in Western Europe, half a dozen in Canada, three in Australia. There aren't a lot of 200-door chains in the world and [we'll] have one with House of Hoops. We'll continue to expand that.

day. We have a single view of the customer and of our inventory. We want the experience for our customers to be as frictionless as possible — it's never going to be seamless, but we want it to be as engaging as possible. We believe the customer is going to shop in whatever channel they chose to shop in and the truth is, I don't care if the customer wakes up and looks at us on digital and buys right away or says hey, I'll stop by Foot Locker or Champs to pick it up later today. The ability to be channel agnostic is what we all strive for. Whether it's at the mall, on their digital device or at home on their iPad or anything else, we're more than happy to take care of them. That's the whole point: The customer should think of us as a brand. The customer doesn't think of us as channels.

be some different things on an upper, it doesn't have to be an innovative cushioning technique, but from a technology point of view, Olympic years bring out the best in the vendors. Innovation will continue to be impactful. And because of it being an Olympic year, our vendors will come with great innovations and we'll commercialize them later on.

So you're expecting a lift next year? There's always a little rise in the Olympic year and then historically there'd be a little dip, a hangover in the year after. But with the way sneakers have proliferated, we didn't see that in 2013 after 2012 — the business stayed healthy and continued to rise. That's partially because of Flyknit and because Nike started to commercialize that very quickly. Now it's one of the hottest things going.

You've said before that the long-term outlook for sneakers is robust as consumers make them their go-to style for all occasions. Is that just a comfort story or is it a shift in fashion? Twenty years ago, sneakers had a definitive look. But now you can get a sneaker that you wouldn't be able to tell [wasn't a dress shoe] unless you looked really close. Sometimes I'll cheat a bit and wear a triple-black sneaker style and no one will notice — but I'm the most comfortable guy in the world.

What kicks do you prefer? My favorite is whatever pair I've got on today. I wear all different vendors, mostly running silhouettes. I try to be a little bit non-denominational. Historically, I'm a classic Air Max 95 guy, but today I wear a little bit of everything. [*He puts down the phone to check his feet.*] Today I've got on a pair of New Balance 572 Elite Edition. They're very comfortable.

So you don't have a standing order in your stores for some of the limited releases? I would never prevent a customer from getting one of those hot launches. Customers come first. The store calls me if they have a triple-black style. They know me now. ●



apparel. And the Jordan shop that is attached is exquisite, quite honestly. It's a great representation of the Jordan brand — and it's great to have it in Chicago, where Michael means so much to the community and gave the community so many championships. It's a really special space, we're really pleased with the partnership with Nike and Brand Jordan and we're certainly pleased it has struck the right chord with customers.

Will you be expanding your stand-alone brand shop program next year? We look for opportunities for all our vendor partners. Part of what we do is tell brand stories and creating the right environment to tell them is really important. Sometimes it's a shop-in-shop, sometimes it's

You've said e-commerce will be a critical element of your 2020 financial goals — what's your outlook for your dot-com banners? It'll be our next billion dollar business, but that will be more of a 2016 number to achieve. I just got out to see the digital folks and I told them it's taken 35 years to get to the first billion — the next billion won't take nearly as long. We see that growth as prolific, and a tremendous opportunity. It remains one of our priorities.

There's a lot of competition — from retailers and your brand partners alike — in the online space. How do you plan to drive shoppers to your sites? The key is making sure the customer is engaged with us and can shop however they want on any given

"The customer should think of us as a brand. The customer doesn't think of us as **channels**. It's not always easy to make that happen, but the customer simply doesn't care."

It's not always easy to make that happen, but the customer simply doesn't care. We want to make it exciting to buy online and on mobile just like we want it to be exciting to shop and buy in our stores.

The athletic world is gearing up for the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. What effect do you expect to see from the games? Innovation is what drives excitement in our channel. And that might



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ORTHOLITE'S ADVANCED, PROPRIETARY AND REVOLUTIONARY OPEN-CELL FOAM TECHNOLOGY SETS THE STANDARD FOR COMFORT AND PERFORMANCE BY DELIVERING A COMBINATION OF BENEFITS UNMATCHED BY ANY OTHER MANUFACTURER.

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CASUAL COOL

The fashion/athletic/outdoor trifecta continues to evolve and new styles for the year ahead put a unique spin on style and comfort. Here are some standouts we've got our eye on.

MEN'S CASUAL FOOTWEAR IS "CLEANING UP" FOR FALL 2016.

ROCKPORT



Boat Builder



Prestige Point

DR SCHOLLS



Tyson



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COBB GALLERIA CENTRE

MEN'S STYLE

SEBAGO



Ronan collection

TIMBERLAND



Ten Mile Chukka, Odelay Chukka

MERRELL



1SIX8 Mid and Moc

CAT



Tristan, Alaric

3 TRENDS TO WATCH

REFINED RETRO

Timeless silhouettes are updated for Fall 2016 with signature design tweaks for casual style. Whether it's a penny loafer or a moc, or an old-school Euro Hiker, 2016's new classics bring reinterpreted details to the season.

URBAN PERFORMANCE

Attributes such as rebound midsoles, waterproofness or extra grippy soles are often thought of as outdoorsy or athletic. But this performance is now key for casual urban styles as well. Think shock absorption for pounding the pavement and Vibram traction for slick sidewalks.

ALL-SEASON

By all-season, we mean any season. Versatility expands beyond "you can wear it from the coffee shop to the office." But now it's "you can wear it in slush or you can wear it sunshine. In bitter cold or balmy weather." Winter, spring, summer or fall — we want one shoe that can do it all.

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Introducing the Spring 2016 Harley-Davidson® Black Label Footwear Collection. This collection takes on a look and feel of its own, with styles that are young, cool, even bad ass, hitting just the right amount of edgy sexiness, while maintaining a heritage vibe. This collection invites young men and women to dress it up or down, and express their own style.

Styles produced by Wolverine Worldwide, Inc.



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BOOT BOOK

**FOR 2016 THERE'S A WHOLE
NEW BREED OF 24/7/365
FOOTWEAR ON THE JOB**



THAT THE TRADITIONAL WORK BOOT HAS BEEN UNDERGOING A RENAISSANCE HAS BEEN strikingly evident during the last five years.

It has morphed, right before our very feet, from a clunky drone to a high-tech performer that's as comfortable on the job site as it is on the trail and the dance floor. The transformation is so complete that it seems more accurate to classify them as shoes instead of boots.

The radical changes were made by the brands in response to the needs and desires of a whole new generation of workers, the so-called Millennials and Generation Xers, who want their work boots not only to work for them, but also to work with them whatever activity they are engaged in.

These are the kids who grew up wearing chic, designer sneakers and they don't want to relinquish their signature comfort or style for something as pedestrian as a 9-to-5 job. Nor do they care to sacrifice high performance merely for the sake of safety.

Like their wearers, the new generation of boots doesn't necessarily fit into any one category, even though, for the purposes of this story, we have put them into four broad ones: Work, Outdoor, Tactical and Street Style.

We let the brands do the choosing and deliberately did not include a Crossover category because nearly every work boot on the market these days is squeezing to fit into it. We found that the Work

and Street Style categories were the most frequently chosen, which illustrates the synergy between fashion and function that we have been reporting.

The boots in the Work category have classic/contemporary looks and high-tech creature comforts. The Outdoor boots are multitaskers with sneaker sensibilities. The Tactical boots, designed primarily for workers in law enforcement and the military, are good-looking, rugged warriors that also do weekend work. And the Street Style boots flawlessly work fashion and function by marrying heritage and retro designs with 21st Century updates.

What unites all the work boots – aside from their high-tech flexibility and functionality – is how comfortable they feel in their own increasingly lightweight skins.

This comfort comes from their athleisure DNA, a fact that has not gone unnoticed by the makers of athletic footwear, some of whom are entering the work boot category either solo or in collaboration with well-known boot brands.

Female workers, too, are finally on the radar, and brands are beginning to ramp up their gender-specific sizes and styles without parading the pink.

Across all categories, what's clear going forward is that the work boot will continue to evolve as each new generation of workers steps into it.

New engineered materials will make it as light as a feather and tough as nails. Stylish, low-cut silhouettes, more sneaker than boot, will transform it to a complete one-shoe-fits-all from workweek to weekend. And technological innovations and appliances will turn it into a DIY, must-wear custom product that can't be beat.

As the 2016 lineup illustrates, the future of the work boot does, indeed, lie in the feet of the Millennials.

BY NANCY A. RUHLING / PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANK JAMES

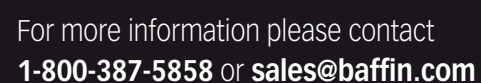
URBAN SERIES FEATURES

TEMPERATURE RANGE
 From 10°C/50°F to -10°C/14°F

INNER
 Thermaplush, breathable next-to-foot
 comfort with removable insole

SOLE
 A midsole with Premium Rubber outsole

EVA midsole with Premium Rubber outsole





Wolverine 1000 Mile's Marcelle, \$320

STREETSTYLE

“Blundstone is going strong into the lace-up boot market. We have such a strong presence in pull-on boots that it was time to join the lace-up party. We will be moving more into women’s-specific boots and we see a lot of opportunity with higher price points as our distribution points in better stores are increasing.”

Tim Engel, National Sales Manager, Blundstone

“We are authentic boot makers. We have been building boots for over 100 years, so to build boots for women that are fashionable and functional comes naturally. We are lucky enough that the boot trend continues to be strong for women like it never has before. The new Classic heel collection is inspired by our traditional Acadia boot silhouette, but with a walkable heel that makes the wearer feel sexy, powerful and maybe even a little edgy.”

Karen McSorley, Brand Manager, Kodiak

“The biggest trend in our women’s category is combining heritage and hybrid. Everyone from coffee shops to car makers is looking for a way to evolve their products while staying true to their roots. The fashion world plays an integral role in this heritage-hybrid movement. Kamik has a century-long history of making footwear in North America. We’ve combined that manufacturing expertise with beautiful design and modern technologies. Our boots are lightweight, weatherproof and ideal to wear from Fall until Spring.”

Davide Degano, Product Manager, Kamik

“Sustainable fashion is a big trend that has had its ups and downs, but with social and economic changes, there has been a big change in consumers’ purchasing mindsets. In the heritage/lifestyle category, material innovation is probably Wolverine’s strongest development. We have a unique relationship with the best tanneries in the world, such as Horween and C.F. Stead, so we can engineer new and exciting materials. With sneaker trends driving more innovative materials and being very experimental, consumers are demanding this type of innovation from a casual lifestyle perspective.”

Martin Shobo, Global Product Line Manager, Wolverine Heritage Collections

“Consumers are looking to brands that are creating versatile performance footwear that’s lightweight, stylish and fits with their everyday lifestyle. For many, the outdoors is a lifestyle, not just a destination. They want products that take them from the street to the trail at a moment’s notice. They want to feel good not just physically in the product but mentally. They want to feel confident that they look good, too. For them, style is a key component.”

Jackie Brown, Women’s Active Lifestyle Product Line Director, Merrell

“Retro/classic designs are returning with modern innovations. This is being driven by technology and the desire for luxury casuals that pair well with active and boho apparel. Going forward, we expect to see athletic-hybrid units that blend classic uppers with lightweight flexibility.”

Charley Brown, Director of Product Development and Design, Sporto

“The most important development is that workwear is streetwear; it’s a combination of performance and fashion to satisfy the needs for aesthetics and function.”

Joe Safdeye, VP, Goodyear Footwear



Kodiak’s Claire, \$190



Kamik’s Sienna, \$119.99



Sporto’s Women’s Cream, \$99



Harley-Davidson Abordale, \$300



Blundstone’s 1363/1364, \$200



Blundstone’s 1363/1364, \$200



Goodyear Footwear’s Phoenix, \$120

FASHION-FORWARD / FUNCTIONAL / HIGH ON HERITAGE / QUICK-CHANGE ARTISTS / WEIGHT WATCHERS



Wolverine's Legend, \$180 (6-inch style with composite toe)

WORKSTYLE

“Some of the styles are getting casual and athletic-looking, but for the traditional work boot it’s all about the quality of the leather. Consumers are very aware of the good-better-best strategy that a lot of the brands have and the leather is the most expensive part of the work boot. With Amazone’s 953, you can pull your pants over the top, and it looks like a nice dress shoe.”

Bob Kaiser, President, Sigma Footwear Group,
(includes the Amazone and Mt. High brands)

“We are still seeing the influence of the outdoor market on the work market. More and more hikers are becoming popular and accepted, as is subtle color pop on outsoles, laces and lining. In the past, this would have been hard to pull off because other generations have preferred simple, no-nonsense designs. Millennials make up the majority of the workforce and they have different wants and needs from other generations. It’s become clichéd to some extent, but millennials want lightweight footwear that is comfortable. They grew up wearing shoes from their favorite athletic companies and they aren’t excited about putting on a pair of work boots that weigh more than two pounds each. So the shoes need to be lightweight, but we understand that the boot still needs to perform.”

Jordan Gottke, Marketing Director, Georgia Boot

“Essentially, people want their work boots to feel like athletic shoes and the athletic and athleisure or casual athletic footwear categories continue to grow in popularity,

which will continue to influence the work/safety product. Not only are we seeing more athletic-inspired work/safety shoes, we will continue to see athletic materials, colors and technology become available in more traditional work/safety looks and silhouettes. Sneaker boots – six-inch- and even eight-inch-tall – are becoming very popular as well, so it will be interesting to see how this look will eventually influence the work/safety landscape.”

Jeff Huckle, Brand Manager, Dickies

“Increased slip-resistance continues to be one of the primary trends in work. The other big trends, being driven by the athletic footwear industry, are styles that come in bright colors like lime green and orange and that have lighter weight and technologically advanced components such as the carbon nanofiber safety toe.”

Don Colbert, Executive Vice President and National Sales Manager, Avenger Work Boots and Nautilus Safety Footwear

“We’re hearing from our customers that there is a need for strong, burly, industrial product combined with a comfortable, athletic feel. The most important development for us is the re-engineered DuraShocks technology that has a fully integrated energy-return system to build more comfort into every step. We’ve revolutionized work boots when it comes to internal comfort, now it’s refining the right color cues and design elements to continue bringing the athletic aesthetic into work footwear in a sensible way.”

Yahn Lebo, Product Line Manager,
Wolverine Work and Outdoor

“The evolution of new materials and footwear construction methods continues to drive innovation, allowing us to develop safety footwear with improved traction, lighter-weight properties and better cushion support systems. Three-dimensional materials coupled with TPU-welded support structures allow for more breathable functionality while bringing more of today’s athletic styling into the work category. Polymer companies such as BASF continue to push the bounds for durable, lightweight materials that are work appropriate. Many athletic materials lack protection against caustics like gasoline or diesel fuel. Statistics point to continued job growth in automotive and residential construction segments. These sectors spur trickle-down employment in support industries.”

Bert Spiller, Director, Product Management,
Footwear and Workwear, Timberland PRO



Keen Utility's Tacoma 8-inch XT CSA, \$240

“There is a generation of customers who have grown up wearing only sneakers. They only know about lightweight, flexible, performance footwear no matter the end use. They want their boots to feel like they are wearing sneakers, but need a boot to work as hard as they do. Young workers are not traditionalists, they are looking for what is new and what is better. Work boot development has been chasing the athletic industry for years. I don’t see that changing for some time, but it’s a challenge to blend the feel and comfort of athletic footwear with the demands and performance requirements of a work boot.”

Rob Mills, President, Black Diamond Group/Carhartt Footwear

“Innovative materials that improve comfort and increase safety are starting to be used more in the work area. PlusFoam and Armourgel are two companies we are partnering with. Comfort doesn’t have to come at the expense of technology; brands that are cutting down on comfort or technology are losing sales.”

Ian Little, Director of Marketing and E-Commerce, Magnum Boots

“Technology, including that in the footwear itself, is going to be a big trend to watch in footwear. Social listening is very important to us. Reading consumer reviews, blogs, digital trends and listening to what they are posting on social media has influenced the types of products we sell and the way we market them. At Cat Footwear, we are creating technology solutions to make workers’ lives better. We created new reflective footwear



Carhartt's CMA6346, \$164.99

HIGH-FIVING THE MILLENNIALS / LETTING THEIR HEAVY LEATHER DOWN / GOING THE DISTANCE / MASTERING COMFORT

WORKSTYLE

to keep workers safe in demanding low-light conditions, a new nano toe that is 40 percent lighter than steel as well as new comfort technology that is our lightest and most shock-absorbing footwear yet.”

Courtney Frank, North American Marketing Manager, Cat Footwear

“With advances in materials and constructions, it’s possible to design work footwear that doesn’t sacrifice on safety or comfort. Doing so in a manner that feels new and fresh and

meets the ever-growing needs of today’s workforce is the challenge and also the end goal. Our Tacoma XT series introduces several new performance and safety features that allow us to reach an entirely new category of workers, especially those who work around caustic or damaging materials and environments that wreak havoc on safety footwear. We are continuing to see a demand for safety innovations and for American-made products, something we continue to support in our Portland, OR, manufacturing facility.”

Mark Reilly, Keen Utility Division Director

“Consumers are demanding high-quality, hand-crafted American footwear, and employees are more inclined to invest in quality footwear that is built to last. American-made footwear delivers on that promise. Consumers also continue to demand developments in footwear that provide all-day comfort while being tough enough to withstand harsh working conditions. Our Made-in-USA Emperor Toe series is wider and more spacious than traditional safety-toe boots and eliminates toe compression or pinching.”

Richard DiFalco, Vice President-Sales, Thorogood Work



Amazone's 953, \$129.99



Cat Footwear's Convex Mid Steel Toe, \$137



Georgia Boot's Blue Collar, \$129.99 (soft toe), \$134.99 (composite toe)



Thorogood's 6-inch Emperor Toe, \$224



Magnum Boots' Defiance 6.0 CT WP, \$175



Avenger Work Boots' Style A7531, \$138.99



Nautilus Safety Footwear's N2115, \$84.99



Timberland Pro's Velocity, \$140



Dickies' Stryker DW7822, \$120

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Salomon's X-Chase Mid CS WP, \$150

OUTDOORSTYLE

"There's just as much hunting going on out West as there is in other parts of the United States, but we have found that most camo is not ideally suited for that environment. We're seeing a lot of people mixing and matching their camos because to them, no camos are really great. So they don't really pay attention. We developed a camo that works just as well in the West as it does in other parts of the country. Our designers did research in Utah and took Pantone booklets to match the camo as perfectly as they could. We've tested it all over the United States, and our field testers love it."

Jordan Gottke, Marketing Director, Rocky Boots

"The most important development is the injection of style into the category. Outdoor footwear has finally broken out of its longstanding traditional shell and is now more eclectic and vibrant than ever. A shoe no longer

has to be brown and built for multi-day treks to be on the shelves. With the lag between fashion and outdoor categories shrinking, more fashion influence will trickle down to the outdoor space. This will take the form of more creative uppers, materials and color combinations."

Sam Barstow, President and COO, Forsake

"The definition of the outdoors has changed, and now it encompasses everything outside. It's about having fun and trying new experiences. New and innovative products encourage people to push themselves further and in new ways. People want to explore their surroundings, and boots like the X-Chase CS WP help them cover ground quickly and comfortably for done-in-a-day adventures."

Kristina Owen, Commercial Associate, Salomon Footwear

"The greatest trend is the ability to have it all in

one boot, from venting, cooling, insulation, grip, comfort, durability and stability to waterproofing. Smart shoppers and the power of the Internet are driving brands to offer more than the traditional boot would have in the past. Hikers, backpackers and outdoorsmen are always looking for ways to power the electronics and gear while out in the backcountry. We see some of this emerging now and will continue to monitor it to see how these two industries collide."

Rolando Garcia Jr., Director of Marketing, CMerit USA

"What's driving this category is the passion to continuously improve function with a stylish twist. How do we make something lighter, more comfortable, warm yet breathable? For example, the addition of Vibram into the first-ever men's U.S. Ski Team boot along with additional proprietary technologies have enabled Khombu to

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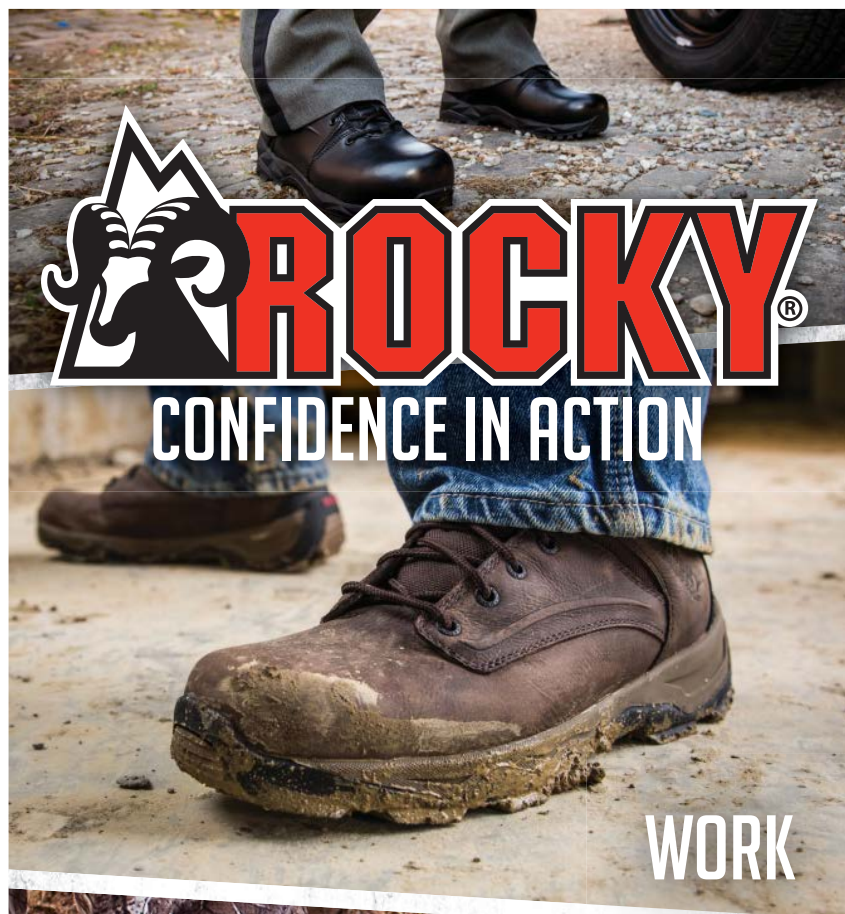
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Brandy McCarty, Divisional Vice President of Global Brand Strategy, Khombu

“The casualization of the outdoor market in general has created the largest shift for the industry. Outdoor footwear has evolved as of late, adopting a simpler aesthetic overall. In particular, we’re developing product that’s inspired by classic styles — reimagining favorites by taking what was old and making it new again with material and technology innovations. In the future, we will see more mash-up and unexpected combinations as consumers continue to refine their look and brands search to differentiate themselves. Products that can find the balance between different enough but not un-wearable will be the ones consumers gravitate toward. Beyond that, there is an emerging trend towards thicker, wider and loftier. Coming off the minimalist trend of a few years back, brands are offering consumers more support and comfort for their everyday lives.”

Gregg Duffy, Senior Director, Outdoor, Timberland

“Versatility without sacrificing performance in footwear is the biggest trend at the moment. The blending of outdoor and everyday life means consumers might sit in an office, take a walk or short hike for lunch and go out to dinner with friends, all in the same day. We expect to see more partnerships and technologies. Hi-Tec, for instance, is partnering with Michelin for Fall 2016 to incorporate innovative outsoles based on proven tire treads.”

Ian Little, Director of Marketing and E-Commerce, Hi-Tec Sports



Baffin's Ease, \$109.99



Hi-Tec Sports' Men's Trail Ox Chukka i WP, \$110



Khombu's Men's Alta, \$139



Nord Trail's Big Bear, \$89.99



Rocky's Stratum Hiker, \$139.99



Timberland's Euro Hiker Jacquard, \$130

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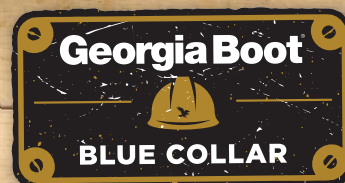
Eric Fracassi, Product Development Director, Bates Footwear

"Law enforcement officers are demanding more technology that helps them perform better. They have to respond to different situations and footwear is a key tool. Wearers are looking for boots that have a lightweight responsiveness and that are also rooted in comfort and flexibility. All of these things go back to performance. Quite a few brands, including several athletic brands, are entering the tactical category. We have been partnering with Reebok since 2013."

Jimmy Maritz, VP-Marketing, Warson Brands



Bates' SRT, \$84.95 to \$89.95



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Keeping an Eye on the Little Details and the Big Picture



Mark Lardie, Rack Room president and CEO

Rack Room Is a \$1 Billion Powerhouse with an Appetite for Growth

By Mark Sullivan

When Rack Room president and CEO Mark Lardie talks about his shoppers, he sounds like the guy who runs the shoe store down the block. He talks about “her time” in the store, a product assortment “she can trust,” and how images in the store depict “someone like her,” rather than the models that are featured in many footwear ads.

What makes the comments especially noteworthy is that Lardie runs 500 stores down the

block: 420 Rack Room stores and 80 Off Broadway stores that generate an estimated \$1 billion in annual revenue.

These stores battle for consumer dollars in the competitive family footwear market against Famous Footwear, DSW and Shoe Carnival. Lardie says his stores have been able to thrive because of their execution of retailing basics: a sharp focus on target consumers, attention to customer service and an emphasis on delivering a solid in-store experience.

“Rack Room targets the

millennial mom. She’s a married working mom between 25-44 years-old who suffers from time poverty. She is looking for an easy, efficient shopping experience,” Lardie tells *Footwear Insight*.

The Off Broadway consumer is a style-savvy shopper, 25-34, who, Lardie says is budget conscious and “loves the thrill of the hunt.” He adds, “Shopping at Off Broadway is her time to breathe. Finding a great shoe at a great price is fun for her.”

That sharp focus on those consumer types defines



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everything about both of these stores — from their locations and online strategies to their merchandise mix, marketing and in-store staffing.

“The shoppers in the stores are different,” Lardie says, “and we’re very cognizant of what we are doing as we think about the customers we serve.”

Rack Room has stores in more than 30 states, mostly in suburban locales and smaller cities, the native habitat of millennial moms. This site selection strategy gives Rack Room separation from the other retailers in the family channel, which Lardie views as a competitive advantage. “We win in markets where we are focused,” he says.

About one-third of Rack Room’s business is in athletic and sport, with Nike, Skechers, Converse and Vans among the strongest brands. Rack Room does about one-third of its business in children’s and one-third in men’s, but it is the female shopper that defines the store. “We offer an edited trend-right product assortment that she can trust,” explains Lardie. “And she trusts us because we focus on what’s right for her.”

Rack Room buyers travel the world, according to Lardie, and know what’s trendy. But he emphasizes “there is a difference between what’s trendy and trend-right and it’s our job to curate the assortment and offer the latter.”

Because the Rack Room shopper is pressed for time, Lardie says the in-store experience is critical. “When you come into our stores, you’re greeted and we have people in the store who will help you,” he says. “We made the conscious decision a few years ago to turn our store staff into a sales force and it’s made a big difference in our business.”

Lardie says Rack Room spends more on staffing than other

family stores, but that its sales per square foot exceed that of DSW, Shoe Carnival and Famous, which according to Sam Poser of Sterne Agee, clock in at \$260.90; \$217.90 and \$227.97, respectively.

Offering home delivery by analyzing real time inventory is one way in which Rack Room

“There is a difference between what’s **trendy** and **trend-right** and it’s our job to curate the assortment and offer the latter.”

uses its sales staff to take care of customers who can’t find exactly what they’re seeking. If a shopper can’t find their size or the color, Rack Room staffers will see if they can find the shoe in another store. If they can locate the shoe, they process the transaction right away with the goal of shipping it to the customer within three days.

Lardie says Rack Room uses home delivery to “save a sale, not make a sale” and says the strategy has been extremely helpful in getting staffers more engaged with shoppers. “In general, sales associates don’t want to talk to shoppers and tell them that we’re out of stock on an item. But now our associates want to talk to them because in most cases we can help them get what they want.”

Rack Room launched its transactional website in December 2014. Lardie admits

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the store was late getting into the e-commerce business, but says the timeline was intentional. “We wanted to be ready to deliver an experience online that was equal to what we strive for in-store,” he says. “The digital consumer is much more vocal in the digital space than brick-and-mortar shoppers are, so we didn’t want

to be there until we were sure we could deliver on the experience.”

Since 1984, Rack Room has been owned by the Deichmann Group, the largest shoe retailer in Europe. Deichmann purchased Off Broadway in 2002 and Lardie has been on board since June 2012.

Lardie says Deichmann is

“private with a capital P,” and indeed the group is as quiet as any store with an estimated \$6 billion in annual revenue can be. Deichmann has more than 3600 stores worldwide including 1300 in Germany, 200 in Poland, 190 in Switzerland and 82 in the United Kingdom with a number of nameplates

and formats. Lardie says they will open an additional 50 stores under the Rack Room and Off Broadway banners in the United States in 2016.

“We have the systems for growth,” he says. “We could do it organically or plug another retail format into what we already have in place.”●

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Hush Puppies Cyra Catelyn II



Hush Puppies Landa Nellie

Footwear is the new accessory of the season as pops of color lend a distinctive splash to an ordinary outfit. “People have a deep connection to their footwear — it’s a way to express one’s individual style through colors, looks and different pairing combinations,” says Jennifer DiBello, senior merchandising manager for Timberland. While some consumers use footwear to make a subtle statement, others are pulling out all the stops when it comes to hot hues.

At the heart of the Timberland brand is the color wheat, notable in the brand’s original yellow boot. Recently DiBello and her team reimagined the heritage of that boot through a head-to-toe capsule collection inspired by a hue called Harvest Gold. The men’s Willoughby six-inch Waterproof Boot with SensorFlex features a culled wheat waterbuff leather and is treated with a dark chocolate finish to provide a new tailored-look upper, while the men’s Britton Hill Waterproof Plain Toe Boot in burnt orange nods to the iconic yellow boot.

For women, the Banfield Mid Lace Boot has been treated with a brushed finish revealing hints of wheat underneath. Olive, burgundy and icy greys fill out the seasonal palette of Horween leathers throughout the line. The Wickett & Craig confections in the brand’s Top Shelf collection are inspired by libations like small batch scotch, bourbon, whiskey and beer, with wheat-inspired chocolate browns and burnt orange shades.

Sticking in the same color family, golden honey is always a key shade for the Cat brand. Classic denim and workwear hues combine to create a range of tinted neutrals ranging from scarlet red to cobalt blue, both reflecting on the brand’s roots, yet updated for a modern consumer.

In the Clay Street Collection, rust is revealed with a side zip Chelsea boot called the Adner and in the rugged Boro, a vintage hiker. For women, cranberry, wine and sassafras are important hues shoes when paired with “gutsy gold buckles on the Persuade boot and a corseted-lace up and heavily pebbled leather on the Olive bootie,” notes Kelly Ballou, director of marketing for Cat Footwear.

Blundstone is banking on burgundy with redwood positioned as a key color. “Now that we are making women’s-specific product, we will be able to extend our palette more than ever,” says Tim Engel, Blundstone’s national sales manager. Bluesteel is another prominent hue. “The

spectrum from what was either black or brown in boots now stretches to white and everything in between, with colored boots becoming such an easy fashion accessory,” he adds.

“Jewel tones are on the must-list for fall colors” for women, says Sally Murphy, senior director of women’s design at Rockport, with rich plum, vino, teal, wine and bordeaux permeating throughout the Cobb Hill and Total Motion collections.

For men, “trousers and pants have been redesigned to remain tighter barreled and neatly cropped to better showcase the styles on their feet,” explains David Pompel, VP—men’s dress for the brand. Select Total Motion Fusion Wingtip and Classic Break Plain Toe styles in tones including navy and charcoal “have become the new standard palette men can wear across seasons. This transition has opened the door for men to feel more confident expanding into new colors,” he adds.

Wolverine is building on business garnered from the launch of the navy leather Evans boot in Fall ’15. “We sold out straightaway and had great reviews on social and digital media,” according to Martin Shobo, global product line manager for Wolverine Heritage Collections.

For men, dark chive green finds its way into the Evans and Percy, while storm grey makes an appearance in the Original 1000 Mile and Felix boots. A two-toned marbled steel grey can be found on the women’s Darcy, which prints pop with a new brown floral leathered Roxana “which brings brown and black together in a very deep and eclectic way,” Poole adds.

Navy and taupe suede take on subdued, red accents at Hush Puppies in the men’s Graton and Fowler EZ Dress styles, but it’s in women’s where pastels really pop with inspiration from Pantone’s 2016 colors of the year — Rose Quartz and Serenity.

“From the rosebud suede of our updated desert bootie, the Cyra Catelyn II, to the blue suede of our stylish Landa Nellie, both are right on trend with the Pantone colors of the year,” notes Shannon Kennedy, U.S. director of marketing for Hush Puppies. For those worried about keeping such confections scuff and stain-free, each is crafted with Worry-Free Suede.

Stepping out in water-resistant shoes makes sense for “the more adventurous customer shopping some of our eye-catching offerings,” the exec says.

— By Suzanne Blecher



Timberland Autumn Leaf



Timberland Willoughby



CAT Olive



Blundstone 1457 and 1302



Rockport Cobb Hill
Keara Chukka



Wolverine 1000 Mile Evans

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COOLRUNNING

When you think of the running industry and its gear, apparel and footwear, the first word that often jumps to mind is performance. And for good reason. At The Running Event in Austin, TX, last month, trade show booths showed off product with plenty of innovation for the year ahead. There was also no shortage of fun – and style – on hand. Here is just a sampling of some of the unique offerings – from performance shoes to laid back styles – that jumped out at us in Austin.



ALTRA DESERT BOOT. Three years ago, running shoe brand Altra paired its original Instinct sole with a soft nubuck leather upper to create the Instinct Everyday. The shoe became a quiet hit and now two more styles will be added to the Altra Everyday category, including this Desert boot, which features supple Italian suede. MSRP \$120. **SALMING MILES.** This Swedish brand's booth was buzzing at The Running Event. The Salming Miles shoe is designed to allow runners to go even farther by increasing the cushioning in the heel and forefoot sections of the shoe. It also has a responsive recoil midsole compound and features a roomy toe box, allowing the forefoot to expand properly in the landing phase. MSRP \$160. **BROOKS VARSITY OLYMPIC CHARIOT.** The performance running brand has a Heritage line of lifestyle shoes that is on-trend with retro style. The Varsity Olympic Chariot features a material and color update to the original Chariot from back in 1982 — the original Brooks Chariot was one of the most-worn running shoes by runners in the '80s. MSRP \$79.99. **UNDER ARMOUR SPEEDFORM SLINGSHOT.** The shoe, which features 3D knit upper technology, was developed and manufactured with the brand's knitwear factory partners. It comes out of the machine in one piece, creating a seamless fit and a shaped heel cup, as well as engineered zones of compression designed to help propel the foot through the gait cycle. MSRP \$140.

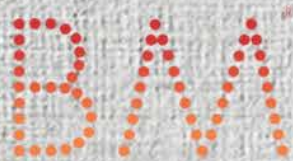


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