

TRENDS, PERSPECTIVE & ANALYSIS • FEBRUARY 2020 • A FORMULA4 MEDIA PUBLICATION

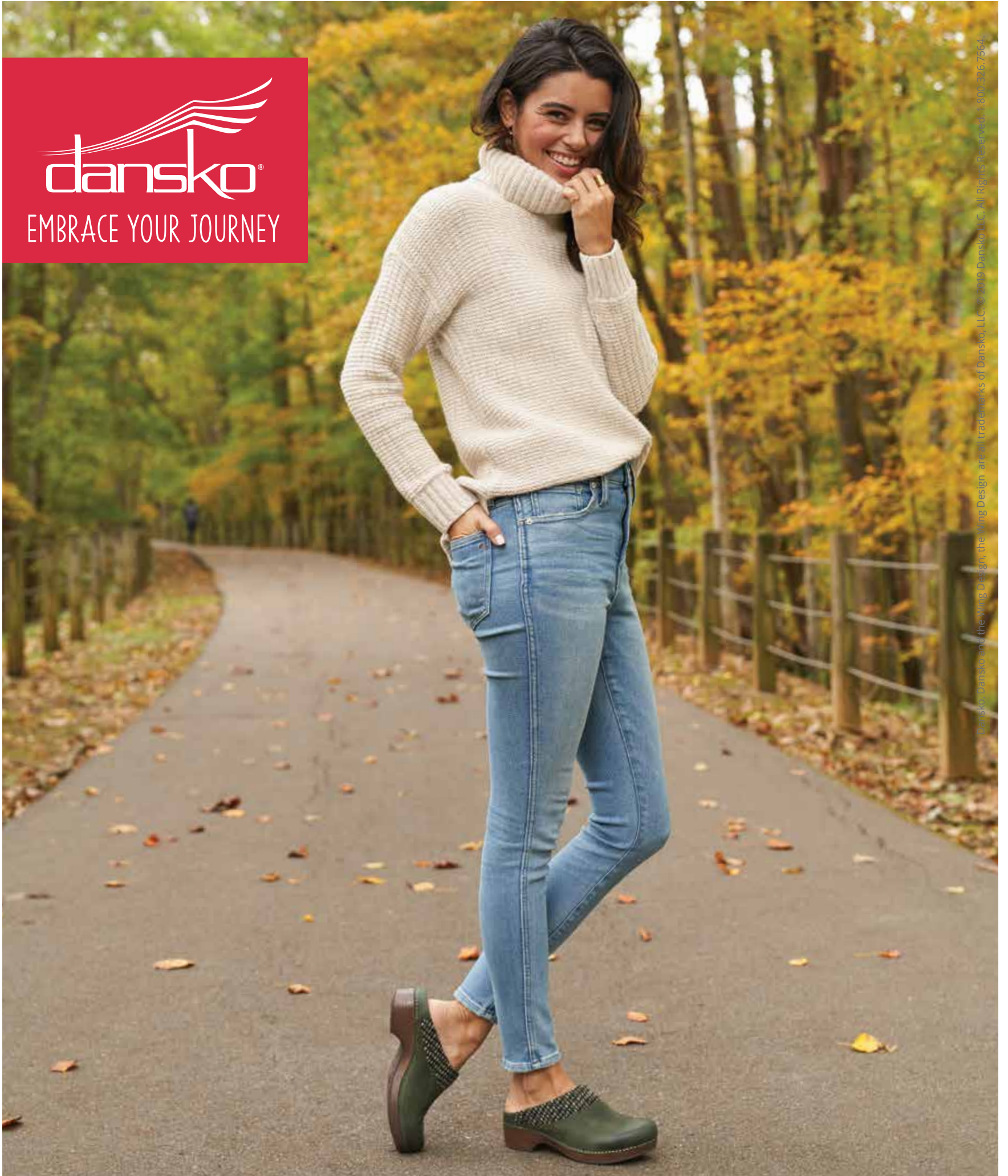
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Retailers are Making in 2020**

**Run for It: The Hottest Styles
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footwearinsight.com

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TRENDS, PERSPECTIVE & ANALYSIS • FEBRUARY 2020



THE BOOT BOOK

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Start It Up



Hello. Hi. Welcome. How are you? How has your 2020 been in these early days?

I'm starting this column the same way I've started dozens of emails and calls in the past few weeks. You may have been having these conversations a lot over the past month, too, as friends and colleagues catch up from holidays, make show appointments, and call with news for a new year.

I like this ritual. It's lovely to reaffirm friendships and connections, it's fun to hear about what people have been up to, and it's necessary if you want to have any show appointments. And for me, it's enlightening — truly — to be in conversation with people as they're plotting out the year to come. Sales strategies, marketing plans, staff initiatives, new launches — it's a fascinating window into the beginnings of plans that will blossom throughout the year.

And this year was no different. Boot brands from all categories showed us the trend-right, feature-packed styles that will make waves come fall. Check them out on page 26: Your next best-selling look might be waiting.

Some of the most illuminating conversations I had this year ended up in Crowd Source on page 20, where shop owners from all channels shared some of the new things they're planning for this year. I was inspired. I think you might be, too.

Trying something new feels like the right thing to do right now, doesn't it? We're not immune, either. As we hope you saw, last month we published our first *Footwear Insight | Sports Edition* issue, and we're already planning the next one. You'll see several more issues from us this year that put the focus on the ultra-important athletic and active lifestyle category, and we're so excited to give it the attention it deserves. (Which isn't to say it's restricted just to our Sports Edition issues — check out what's hot in running now and hear from running retailers on page 16.) Added to that, our *Footwear Insight Extra* newsletter is now publishing every Wednesday, and we've got a few more ideas we're working on for future reveals — stay tuned.

It's exciting to see the beginnings of things, but it's even better to see them come to fruition, and we're so looking forward to watching all of this planning and prediction come to life. So here's to bringing all these plans to life; we're looking forward to seeing what transformations you've got up your sleeves, too.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jen Beaudry". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

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MARKETING

Oofos Launches “Don’t Take Our Word For It” Campaign



Oofos sees an opportunity for growth in the comfort independent and broader comfort and family channels.

Oofos is targeting new accounts in 2020, and has launched its broadest and largest ever ad campaign to grow the business.

Oofos President Steve Gallo said the Braintree, MA-based brand wants to build on its strength in the outdoor and run specialty markets, and sees an opportunity in the comfort independent and broader comfort and family channels. In addition to accounts like Harry’s Shoes in New York and Dardano’s in Denver, he said, Oofos is now in Scheels, all doors of REI, and is testing with DSW.



Growing brand awareness will be key to plans to expand in independent channel.

“Our biggest issue is brand awareness,” he said. “The advocacy people have for our product and brand is pretty amazing; We have a net promoter score in the 90s, and our average customer owns 3.3 pairs. But last time we did research, our brand awareness was less than 3 percent. We’ve grown 68 percent over the last 5, 6 years, but without that awareness, we can’t really scale it.”

Gallo said the campaign is the largest in Oofos’ history — an investment four times as large as any previous ad spend. Called “Don’t Take Our Word for It,” it will use the testimonials of loyal brand fans and highlight key styles including the OOmg closed-toe style (pictured above) and OOhlala thong sandal (at left). Gallo said the aim was to showcase the brand’s styles to fitness-oriented 28- to 35-year-old urban women, as well as a broader group of consumers seeking comfort or relief from foot ailments by highlighting the brand’s proprietary Oofoam. The campaign debuted in late January, and will run through 2020, on social media, on YouTube and with display ads. Oofos will also be deploying campaign POS material in more than 350 partner doors and will provide digital assets to retail accounts, and will be testing TV as well. —*Jennifer Ernst Beaudry*

PARTNERSHIP

Sanuk Turns Up the Volume

Sanuk’s partnership with legendary music producer Rick Rubin is all about the Aum. Coming in two color ways and made with vegan, responsibility sourced materials, the men’s slip-on versions of the Sidewalk Surfer style are currently available exclusively on Sanuk’s website. In both a white and blanket print inspired by Rubin’s time in Hawaii and love of nature, the \$70 Vagabond x Rick Rubin feature 100 percent cotton uppers, midsoles made with recycled PLUSfoam and have faux crepe rubber outsoles.



Sanuk is partnering with legendary music producer Rick Rubin on Aum, a new collection of men’s footwear.

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U.S. MANUFACTURING

Darn Tough Growth Continues into 2020



Sock maker Darn Tough Vermont, based in Northfield, VT, is adding a new a new 50,000-square-foot manufacturing facility to its production next year, and expects to have 100 people working at the new Waterbury, VT site in 2021. The leased space is part of an ambitious five-year growth plan for Cabot Hosiery Mill, Darn Tough's parent company. In an interview with the local press, CEO Ric Cabot said the company expects to sell 8 million pairs of socks in 2020.

Renovations will start in February to create an additional 17,000 square feet of office space in the facility, with manufacturing starting in Waterbury later in 2020. The company's headquarters and existing sock factory will stay in Northfield. Darn Tough recently spent \$2.5 million updating the 100-year-old Nantanna Building to increase the company's space for manufacturing and internet fulfillment in Northfield.

"We're doing this to fund our growth, but it's also for the long term," Cabot was quoted as saying. "It's for the prosperity and job security of the people who have been with us all these years." ●

SneakERASERS Aims to Clean Up with New Product



Keeping kicks fresh and clean is priority No. 1 for sneakerheads, making sneaker cleaning products a hot category. A new, mini sponge-like product called SneakERASERS is designed to remove scuff marks, grime, and smudges from soles and rubber logos without the need for messy applicators, brushes, or sprays. SneakERASERS is a combo of a sponge and shammy and features an all-natural cleaning formula. When water is added to it, one side of the sponge works on smooth uppers and logos, while the other side, an orange shammy, wipes away residue. When the sponge dries it can be re-used by adding more water to reactivate it.

MSRP \$9.49 (for a 3-pack).

ReCoup's Cool New Sleeve Uses BOA

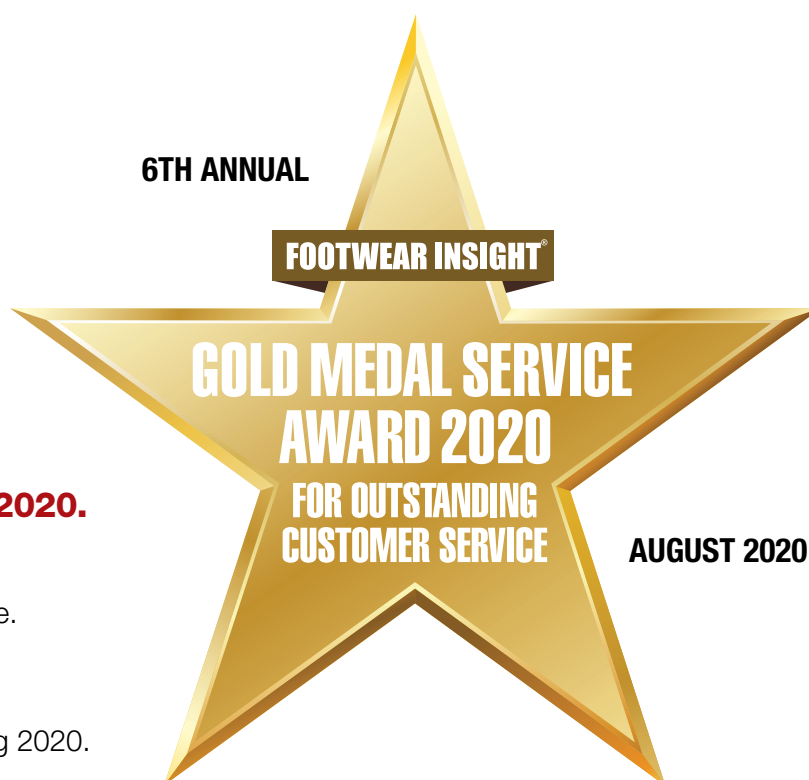


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Nominations are open to all independently owned shoe stores.

Footwear Insight's mystery shopping evaluations will begin Spring 2020.

RETAIL

Boot Barn Banks on Own Brands, Looks to Further Openings



Boot Barn's own brands account for more than 20 percent of its total revenue.

Irvine, CA-based Boot Barn will put locations in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Arkansas as part of its plan to double its store count to 500, Boot Barn President Jim Conroy told attendees at the ICR Conference in Orlando last month.

Conroy said that the firm's own brands currently account for more than 20 percent of its total revenue, to the tune of \$175 to \$200 million. The six-label roster includes Moon Shine, endorsed by country star Brad Paisley, and Idyllwind, pitched by Miranda Lambert. Boot Barn's Cody James work label is now pegged as a \$100 million business, with the Shyanne label hauling in an estimated \$50 million in annual revenues.

Brown, distressed leather boots are the best sellers at Boot Barn, which generates 52 percent of revenues from footwear and 17 percent of sales from e-commerce and expects to approach a 10 percent operating margin in its next fiscal year. The chain operates three online businesses: Boot Barn, Country Outfitters and Sheplers, which Conroy said will be retooled in hopes of expanding beyond the "bargain basement" customer. — *Bob McGee*

EXEC MOVES

Timberland President Jim Pisani Steps Down

Jim Pisani has resigned his position as global brand president at Stratham, NH-based Timberland to be closer to his family in the Midwest, Timberland parent company VF Corp. announced.

Pisani had held the top spot at Timberland since 2016. VF Group President of EMEA Martino Scabbia Guerrini will serve as acting global brand president as a search for a new president is conducted.

"Jim is an extremely talented leader who has left an indelible mark on the Timberland brand and VF overall during his time here," Scabbia Guerrini said in a statement. "Today we have a strong foundation and leadership team in place



to guide us into the future. We understand and support Jim's decision, and are grateful for his service. We are firmly committed to find the right person for this role – someone who brings deep industry experience and embodies Timberland's culture and commitment to social and environmental responsibility," he said. — *Jennifer Ernst Beaudry*

News and Notes

Nelsonville, OH-based **Rocky Brands** said its largest retail business, Lehigh, is involved with building custom websites for employers to offer only the boot styles that meet its particular specifications. The websites offer third-party brands beyond Lehigh, including Reebok Timberland Pro, Ariat, Keen and Justin. For the Rocky brand, the company is aiming to broaden the label's appeal to reach more grassroots outdoor customers, who typically wear the Patagonia and The North Face brands.

Big 5 Sporting Goods, in announcing a 0.6 percent same store sales decrease for Q4 ended Dec. 29, 2019, said year-over-year merchandise margins rose 239 basis points and footwear category sales rose in the low-single digit range. Fueled by demand for seasonal winter products, apparel comps increase in the mid-single digits range. The El Segundo,

CA-based company attributed the improved results to its strategic decision related to pricing and promotions during the holiday season. For FY19, the chain generated a 1.2 percent comparable stores sales increase and realized 66 basis point improvement in merchandise margins.

Genesco, parent company of Journeys, generated 2 percent comparable sales (stores and direct) growth in Q4 through Jan. 9. Mimi Vaughn, who is set to become president and CEO of the Nashville company on Feb. 2, said Genesco's online investments paid off during the holiday period as digital accounted for 21 percent of Q4 revenues. The Journeys Group, which is eyeing a "handful" of fill-in stores and sees some opportunities ahead for the Journeys Kidz franchise, will likely hit an 8.0 percent operating margin for FY19. ●

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EARNINGS

Nike's 2020: Digital, Running and Converse

When Nike reported its second-quarter earnings in December, the Beaverton, OR-based firm outlined the strategic priorities it was pursuing in 2020. Here were our takeaways.

1. The Line Online and In-Store Blurs Further
Digital commerce sales grew 38 percent during period, fueled in part by 70+ percent growth in North America on Black Friday. Nike+ added three million members in Q2. The company says it's changing the

experience of finding a product and how it is delivered. RFID investments will allow Nike customers to track down a product in the same store, online or even at another retail partner of the brand. New CEO John Donahoe should keep the company's digital motivation humming.

2. Technological Investment Only Accelerates
Recent acquisitions of Celect and Zodiac will help Nike worldwide to predict the proper supply of products down to style, color and size, and generate stronger

full-price sell-throughs, more efficient markdowns and fewer days in inventory for all products.

3. North America is Stable
The Swoosh's home market wasn't as strong as other global regions in Q3, but still respectable with 8 percent growth in footwear to more than \$2.4 billion and a 5 percent overall topline increase.

4. Running Will Draw Attention
Both performance and lifestyle will receive more attention in 2020, particularly with the Tokyo Olympics from July 24-Aug. 9, with new sportswear products introduced ahead of the global event, including a new Zoom Air running

Both performance and lifestyle will receive more attention in 2020, particularly with the Tokyo Olympics.

platform. Nike is also promising to deliver more "core pricepoint" running silhouettes this year, including the Renew concept, new styles under the Air Max platform and more unique women's styles.

5. Converse Worldwide
The Converse brand's sales grew 15 percent in Q2 to \$480 million, driven by double-digit expansion in Europe and Asia. Nike is promising to differentiate the brand's product line beyond the Chuck by creating new opportunities in basketball, possibly running and apparel.

— Bob McGee



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C-SUITE

Executive Moves at Twisted X, Minnetonka

Decatur, TX-based footwear brand **Twisted X** named **Scott Sessa** SVP of Business Development. Sessa served as president of Minnetonka Moccasin for 13 years, where he was the first outside president in the family-run business' history. In his new role, Sessa will be responsible for creating and maintaining growth across the Twisted X, Black Star, Tamarindo and CellSole brands. "I have known Scott for most of his adult life and have seen him progress from a management trainee at Wolverine Worldwide to becoming president of Minnetonka. The timing was perfect. We were in need of a leader that could



Scott Sessa

propel our international expansion as well as accelerate our domestic growth, and Scott was ready for his next opportunity," Twisted X CEO Prasad Reddy said in a statement.

Minnetonka announced that **Jori Miller Sherer**, most

recently the brand's VP of Business Development, would take over as president. Miller Sherer joined Minnetonka in 2010. As president, she will oversee global sales and marketing. She is the fourth generation of the Miller family to hold the president's office of the 74-year-old firm. "[Jori] has a deep knowledge and understanding of its heritage and what Minnetonka means to consumers. She is able to look to the brand's future in an entirely new way that will ensure Minnetonka continues to grow and thrive for the next generation," David Miller, CEO of Minnetonka, said in a statement.

Rusty Hall is back at **Mephisto**. Hall, who served as president and CEO between 2010 and 2015, will be returning to the role at the Franklin, TN-based firm. He most recently served as executive director of sales for Hush Puppies North America. "We are excited to have Rusty return to lead our U.S. operations. His proven ability at delivering results along with his expert leadership, product development, brand management and operational skills will be extremely valuable as we take Mephisto into the next decade," Frank Weber, president of Mephisto worldwide, said in a statement. ●

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TECHNOLOGY

The Science of Speed

Last year closed with two eye-popping feats in the running world. On Oct. 12, Eliud Kipchoge broke the two-hour marathon barrier, long thought an impossible feat, with a time of 1:59:40 during a specially tailored event in Vienna, Austria. On Oct. 13, Brigid Kosegi obliterated the 16-year women’s marathon record by more than a minute, finishing the Chicago Marathon with a time of 2:14.04 and setting a new world record.

The common thread in both wins — and a topic of fierce debate since — was the latest iterations of Nike’s new racing franchise.

Launched in 2017, The Nike Vaporfly 4% shoes were specifically created with the mission of improving running economy by four percent — enough to make a difference in an elite marathon pace of a few minutes, or possibly enough to drop a runner’s time from world-record pace (at the time, 2:02.57) to under 2 hours. The shoes have been refined since their debut: the \$250 Nike ZoomX Vaporfly NEXT% is out now, and a version of Kipchoge’s race-day version, the AlphaFly, is anticipated.

To find out what’s inside the shoes that have everyone talking, we went to an expert.

Simon Bartold is a podiatrist, biomechanics expert and CEO of Bartold Clinical, an educational resource for podiatrists, physiotherapists and sports medicine professionals. Bartold has spent his career investigating the relationship between shoes and feet, and has held positions in the industry including director of strategic planning for Salomon and more than a decade as international research consultant for Asics. Here’s what he had to say about materials, the science of getting faster, and the “arms race” he sees coming:

What makes the shoes different?

Bartold highlights two technologies: carbon fiber plates (The Next% shoe has one; the AlphaFly prototype has three), and surrounding them, ultra-thick layers of Pebax foam. Pebax, a thermoplastic elastomer, is no stranger to footwear, and is frequently found in a more rigid form in soccer boots or as a plate in hiking product. The foam version of the material is less common but not

unheard of — Reebok’s FloatRide cushioning using foamed Pebax debuted last year. In the AlphaFly and Next% styles, the material makes up the super-thick, rocker-shaped midsole.

Why do they work?

The carbon plate in the midsole acts as a lever, which improves the ankle mechanics of the runner and puts less load on their calves. The foam is the biggest contributor: the Pebax material itself is characteristically springy, and in the thickness of the shoes it creates what Bartold calls “extraordinary” energy return. “Obviously, [the first shoe]



Nike ZoomX Vaporfly Next%

was called 4% because the suggestion was that it would offer a four percent advantage in economy, that you would extend four percent less energy in it. And when that came out, a lot of people said, oh, it’s just marketing. But to date, all the studies have shown at least a four percent advantage, and some as much as six percent,” he said.

How does the material return energy?

Bartold thinks it comes down to vibration. He explains that a major cause of muscle fatigue is in absorbing and attenuating the vibrations that pounding the pavement send through the body. Vibration puts stress on bones, tendons, muscles, nerves and blood

How Materials Factor into Nike’s Much Talked About Vaporfly Franchise.

By Jennifer Ernst Beaudry

vessels — a shoe design that could absorb significantly more of that input would make a measurable impact on muscle fatigue. And the sandwich construction of the shoe midsole could act much like a soundproof wall it resembles, dampening vibration and giving the runner the extra energy, tests show.

Can anyone see time drops using the same technology?

Probably not. “I think what most people are thinking is that these shoes are best exploited by the very best elite runners,” he said. “Only the fastest athletes — elites and competitive runners, and possibly even very fast recreational runners — will be able to activate both the foam and the plate to their full advantage. For a weekend warrior, the benefit is probably quite questionable.”

What will this do to the running shoe market?

It’s complicated. A decision is expected early this year from sport governing body World Athletics (formerly known as the International Association of Athletics Federation) as to whether the technology used in the Vaporfly shoes is permissible in competition, i.e., whether or not they give an unfair advantage to wearers of the shoes over athletes not wearing them. But no matter which way the ruling goes, it’s almost a moot point, he said.

“That shoe was already obsolete the day he broke the record,” Bartold asserts. “Newer, more sophisticated models are certainly in the pipeline, and I have no doubt at all that in 18 months to two years, there will be other product to test the boundaries of legality. I think the genius of what Nike’s done is they’ve enacted an absolutely brilliant marketing plan. There’s never been a shoe where the manufacturer says it will make you faster and then the research supports it.”

The shoe has certainly kicked off what Bartold calls an arms race as other major brands are rumored to have their own new technologies debuting in 2020 in the run-up to the Olympics. “In the last 10 years, it’s been a complete innovation vacuum in running footwear,” he said. “I’m really intrigued to see what comes next.” ●



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FULL SPEED AHEAD

By Cara Griffin and
Jennifer Ernst Beaudry

Run shops have a lot to look forward to in 2020. A surge of fresh technical product, the summer's Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo catalyzing consumer interest, and product growth at the premium side of the shoe market are all opportunities for growth and connection.

But like most independents, run shops see hurdles ahead. Pricing uncertainty, product shortages and competition for key styles, and a consumer always willing to look online for a better deal are vexing issues.

With that in mind, we asked running shop owners across the country to share what they're thinking about for 2020. Here, they sound off on the biggest challenges they're seeing for 2020 — and yes, the biggest opportunities they're aiming for.

■ “I feel the biggest challenge is one that continues to change the way small retailers do business and that is e-commerce and online shopping. Customers are becoming so accustomed to instant gratification by ordering product with no risk and at a significant discount that we have to continually evaluate how to keep customers coming in our doors, rather than shopping from their computers and phones. Brands are doing a better job to protect us retail partners, but they have a long way to go. The biggest opportunity is the cross training market. I am always amazed by how many people participate in CrossFit, Orange Theory, and HIIT and are naive about good shoes and gear. I think there is a

Run shop owners share their biggest challenges, and greatest opportunities, for 2020.

lot of opportunity for us to educate and cater to those customers.”
Brad Brown, Complete Runner, Flint, MI

■ “I think the biggest challenge for Playmakers in 2020 is how we curate the best products for our customers. I believe there is too much product in the pipeline, too many vendors producing good, and in some cases, great product. Our buyers have many great buffet offerings — but they can't overeat! We need to pick the best products for our customers and say no to more products to make things less confusing for them.”

John Benedict, Playmakers, Okemos, MI

■ “I foresee continued product shortages from some brands. As product improves, I think everyone will be chasing sales, creating a shortage of product. Ultimately, I think this is a good thing and becomes an opportunity. I'd love to introduce customers to new products or brands and challenge them to try something they may not have otherwise been exposed to. I'm having talks with more brands about creating a stronger omni-channel between dealer and brands. We know a lot of research is done online before a purchase is made in store. We're having conversations beyond the current Locally options, to bridge the gap between the brands dot-com and the brick-and-mortar experience: think in-store exchanges and sharing customer databases to drive traffic to events.”

Justin Craig, RUNdetroit, Detroit, MI

■ “The biggest challenge will be how we continue to grow in uncertain economic times. Tariffs and

other events loom over us and could affect our business. The biggest opportunity will be how we react to the challenges ahead.”

Mark Jimenez, Red Rock Running Company, Las Vegas, NV

■ “Who ever would have anticipated the collapse of the Brooks distribution system and the downward pressure that put on availability of shoes from many manufactures? But it also created an opportunity to move out older product and pull shoes our staff may not have normally pulled. We are most excited about the many new shoes manufacturers are bringing to market [with] carbon fiber plates and new cushioning systems. The community aspect of running continues to grow, and we find our fun runs continue to attract more people, bonding runners together.”

Jeff Anderson, Kelley's Pace, Mystic, CT

■ “The biggest challenge will always be the online purchasing. People compare what's in front of them at the store to what is online and want price matching. We, of course, do our best to accommodate, if it's the same product — the biggest opportunity is provide the best customer service to keep that customer coming back for life. Being one-on-one with a customer can provide some of the best conversations and learning for us and the customer. The customers drive our business and we love to go over the top for each one and to make them feel like they are walking into a very welcoming atmosphere.”

Mike Shuman, Idaho Running Company, Boise, ID ●

New for Fall 2020, the **Reebok Forever Floatride Grow** is a plant-based running shoe with a cushioned, responsive midsole that is built from sustainably grown castor beans. The shoe maintains the performance and lightweight cushioning standard of the original Forever Floatride Energy, according to the brand. And its eucalyptus tree upper is naturally biodegradable, sustainably sourced, strong and breathable. (Turn the page to see more new 2020 running footwear styles.)





The official training shoe of Edward Cheserek, the \$120 **Skechers GOrun Ride 8 Hyper** features Skechers Hyper Burst cushioning – the brand’s most resilient midsole foam to date. It also has a Goodyear performance rubber outsole for durability and traction, plus a breathable, engineered knit upper that stretches to move with the foot.



The new **Bedlam 3** from **Brooks**, \$150, combines energy and springiness and its new DNA AMP cushioning is 20 percent lighter than its predecessor.



Salomon’s Predict 2 shoe for Fall 2020 is the second iteration of a road running favorite from the brand. The new edition builds upon the first, combining the knee-saving mirrored decoupling on the outsole with new Infiniride foam for a comfortable, flexible and dynamic ride.



Hoka One One’s Rincon 2, \$115, has a full compression EVA midsole that provides the cushioning Hoka is known for. A slim tongue package reduces weight and an engineered sandwich mesh upper offers breathability. A heel pull tab ensures easy entry.



Saucony is focused on speed with its new **Endorphin** collection for Fall 2020. The three road shoes in the line include the Endorphin Pro (far right) for race day performance; the Endorphin Speed (middle) for up-tempo runs and speedwork; and the Endorphin Shift (far left) for everything in-between. Featuring SpeedRoll, the brand’s proprietary always-forward outsole geometry, each shoe is designed to deliver a fast and easy propulsive ride.

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A Change Would Do You Good

What to do when the outlook is unclear? Shake things up.

By Jennifer Ernst Beaudry

The last decade brought change in spades to independent retail. The relentless rise of online and mobile shopping, massive growth in vendor DTC and seismic shifts in the way shoppers consume media and promotions have all shifted the landscape. And last year especially, new concerns on tariffs and pricing, as well as renewed concerns about the sustainability and ecological impacts of product, further complicated the picture.

It's no wonder that when we spoke with retailers at the dawn of 2020 that the word that came up again and again was "uncertainty." No matter the particular geographic demographic or category mix of the store, uncertainty about the future could bring in pricing, about busi-

ness, about staffing challenges and about the long-term health of the channel was top-of-mind for most store owners.

But far from feeling paralyzed, we were struck by how energized stores are to tackle changes head-on. Faced with the unknown, shops across the country are planning new tactics, fresh approaches and innovative measures to shake things up, double down on successes and start chipping away at problems. Below, we've included some (but certainly not all) of the mold-breaking plans smart independent retailers shared with us for the year ahead.

Strategic Shifts

Some shops are starting at the very beginning, giving their selling strategies an overhaul for the new year.

Adam White, owner of RC Outfitters in Peoria, IL, said trend

lines at his store have been clear: apparel has been the only growth area for more than three years in both revenue and units. And that, he said, calls for a new approach.

"Historically, our industry is accustomed to asking, 'How do I sell off the footwear bench?'" he said. "That's where we've sold PT equipment, apparel, reflective gear and hydration. Now we have to figure out, 'How do we sell shoes, PT equipment, reflective gear and hydration out of the fitting room?'"

White said he will be working with his staff on reworking the dressing room area to spark conversations with shoppers trying on clothes about other needs. Trips to regional shows in other markets have given him ideas on new ways to look at key categories (seeing performance socks as an impulse add-on buy like in outdoor instead of an integral part of the sale like in



running, for example) that change the buying, pricing and merchandising strategy for the items they bring in.

“My job is to react to the trends and get the systems and processes we need to set my team up for success,” he said.

Other shops are turning the whole idea of competition on its head.

Stephanie Blozy, owner of Fleet Feet Hartford in West Hartford, CT, said she’s hosting a launch event for Brooks’ new running bra collection in February — but for the women who work at other local run shops, not customers. “People may think it’s weird to invite your ‘competitors’ to help them sell bras better, but I think we stores need to work together to grow our market share as a whole so we don’t keep losing sales to Amazon, discounters and big-box stores,” she said.

Event Overhauls

Ross Martinson, owner of the five Philadelphia Runner stores in and around Philadelphia, PA, said that he was looking to expand on a solid growth year. And one path, he said, will be making a bigger deal of new styles coming in store.

“Product launches were a source of traffic and sales in 2019, and we will expand our support in both buys and marketing,” he said. “Consumers are so in tune with what is new and coming out. If they know we have something, they are coming in.”

Another tactic for the year, he added, would be leveraging his staff’s insights into the consumer and what they want. “A couple of our best events last year were staff ideas, a ‘can I do this?’” he said.

“We stores need to work together to grow our market share as a whole so we don’t keep losing sales to Amazon, discounters and big-box stores.”

**Stephanie Blozy,
Fleet Feet Hartford**

“We want to do a better job supporting that creativity, and we are budgeting for it.”

Staffing Solutions

Taking advantage of staff expertise is a theme that came up again and again.

“For us, when uncertainty hits — things like tariffs and the state of the running market — what we really try to do is focus on what we do best, and make sure that we’re presenting that to staff and customers,” said **Sonya Estes**, owner of Lakewood, CO’s Runners Roost. “Are we giving them a reason to come back, are we treating them well, are we giving them a place they can come to get education on running and training?”

To do that in 2020, she said, the store will be making a point of going over customer-service expectations with staff — and, she said, looking to bring some of their eight part-time workers (about half the staff) in more often with additional hours.

“Our customers, they like to see a familiar face, so we’re going to work on staff retention, and making sure they’re here,” she said.

Customer Care

Ahh Comfort Shoes in Arlington Heights, IL, is planning a new program — kicked off with a special event — to reward its very best customers.

Owner **Jeffrey Seidman** says his shop’s “royalty” event will reward its top 50 customers with a year-long discount as well as a thank-you event in-store with wine, cheese, food and giveaways.

“We have found, as most people have, that we get 80 percent of our business from 20 percent of our

clientele, and that our top 1 percent is worth a staggering amount of those dollars,” he said. “We want to create a better relationship with those people we know already work with us.”

Efforts to reward loyal customers while bringing in new faces is top of the agenda for **Steven Rueda**, owner of Turnpike Comfort Shoes in Flushing, NY.

Rueda said that after taking a look at the numbers, he’s borrowing an idea from a fellow owner to bring new customers into his door.

Knowing that 32 percent of his customers — the largest share— come through word of mouth, he’s making referral cards to hand out to customers. The cards offer a \$10 discount for new shoppers, and gives the referring customer a \$25 store credit.

“I got this idea from Sue Orischak at Foot Solutions Scottsdale, and I think this is a no-brainer,” he said. “A print ad can cost me \$300 to \$500 and maybe you get one or two new customers, if you are lucky. Spending \$35 to obtain a new customer and rewarding the referring customer is very clever.”

Rueda is pairing the cards, he said, with some digital plans.

Not only will the referral cards leave information on leaving reviews for the store online (“getting more reviews, and making sure they are 5 star reviews, is very important,” he stressed), he’s adding outreach. “I’ve hired a digital marketing firm to increase my SEO and social media presences. Though we have a selling website, my goal here is to get more customers into the store, not necessarily to buy on my site,” he said. “Because what we do best is fit.” ●



We surveyed 302 consumers. Here is what they told us.

These Boots Are Made For Walking

Consumer Insights on the Classic Multipurpose Style



One thing is clear: Consumers love boots. But don't take our word for it — this month's boot survey was our most popular with our consumer panel yet. We surveyed 302 active men and women from ages 18 to 60, with an average age of 40, to find out what kind of boots they buy and where they buy them. And no surprise, the hard-working category came through as a go-to silhouette for both work and play. Fully 82 percent of

respondents had purchased fashion boots in the prior year, 72 percent had bought cold-weather boot styles and 56 percent had bought outdoor models. Even more encouraging? 53 percent of respondents said they shopped independent shoe retailers to pick up the boots they want and need. ■

The survey, conducted by MESH01, included 302 respondents, male and female.

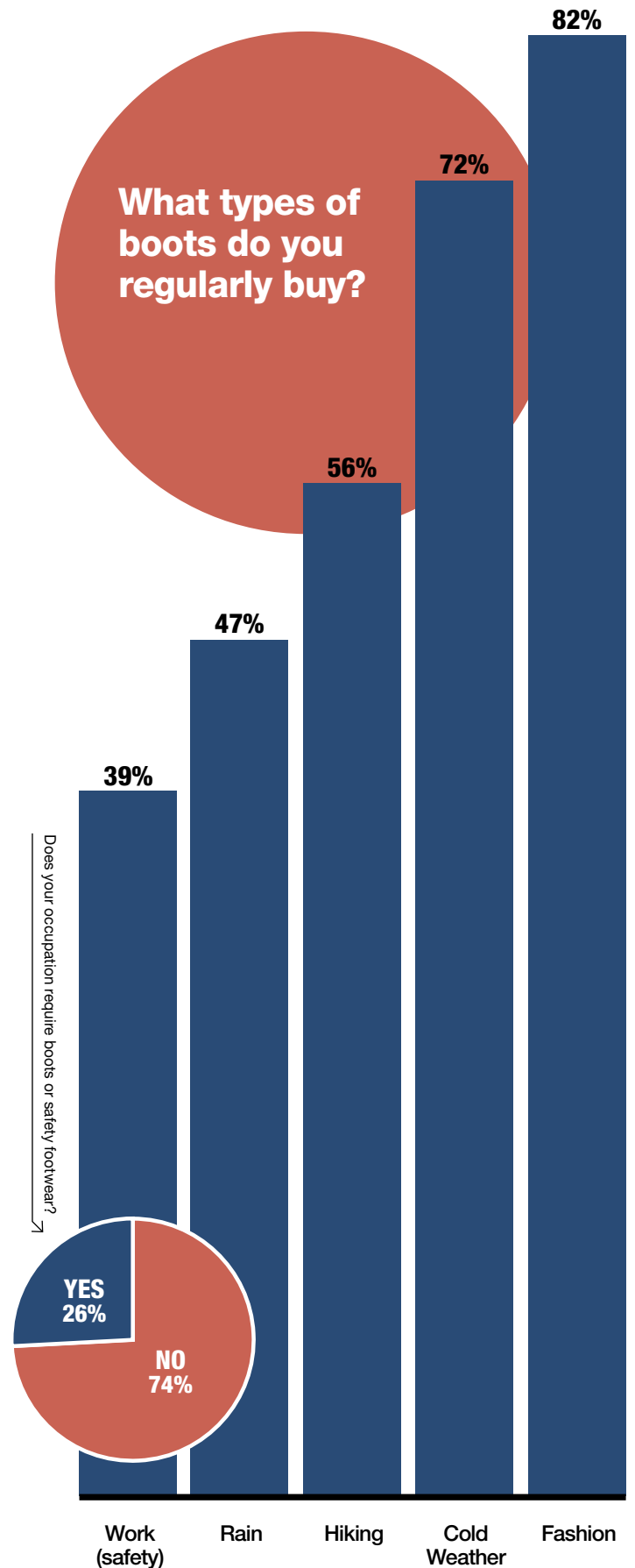


SEIZE THE TREND!

Visit trendinsightmag.com for our surveys in footwear, sports, outdoor and product design.

Trend Insight Consumer is a feature within *Footwear Insight* that delivers research conducted on the MESH01 Platform. MESH01 collects data from a select panel of sports enthusiasts. For information on the Mesh1 Platform, contact Brian Bednarek at 603-766-0957 or brian.bednarek@mesh01.com. For more information on *Trend Insight Consumer* and how your company can participate, contact Jeff Nott at 516-305-4711 or jnott@formula4media.com.

What types of boots do you regularly buy?



Please rank the features below in order of importance when choosing what boots to buy:

- #1 COMFORT
- #2 INSULATION/WARMTH
- #3 DURABILITY
- #4 WATERPROOF / WATERRESISTANT
- #5 FASHION/STYLE
- #6 PRICE
- #7 NON-SLIP

Do your priorities change depending on what type of boot you are looking for?
(e.g. Weather, Fashion or Work)



Rain boots would raise my waterproof and slip-proof priority. **Female 50**

I don't really care about style when looking for hiking boots. **Female 37**

Yes of course. I'd choose a warmer boot when I'm in the market for a winter boot but when I am shopping for fashion boots, style comes first for me. It would be nice to have a multipurpose boot that meets both fashion and weather needs, though. **Female 32**

Fashion for me is more about style and comfort. For work it's more about durability, water resistance and comfort. **Female 30**

I view my boots like tools in my toolbox. I use the right tool for the job and I'll buy the right

boot for the purpose I need a boot for. It could be for fashion or function. **Male 42**

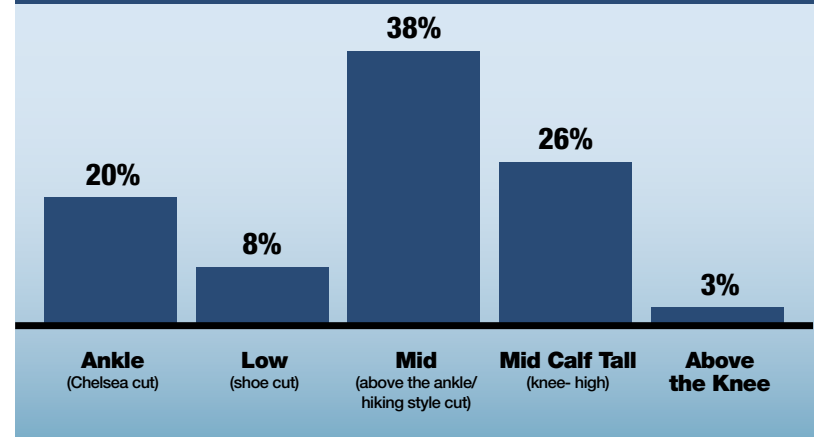
For a fashion boot, I'm more price-conscious because they don't necessarily mean as much to me in my daily life. If I'm buying a hiking/rain/winter boot I'm more inclined to splurge on a high-quality item. **Male 33**

I want rain boots to be waterproof **Female 49**

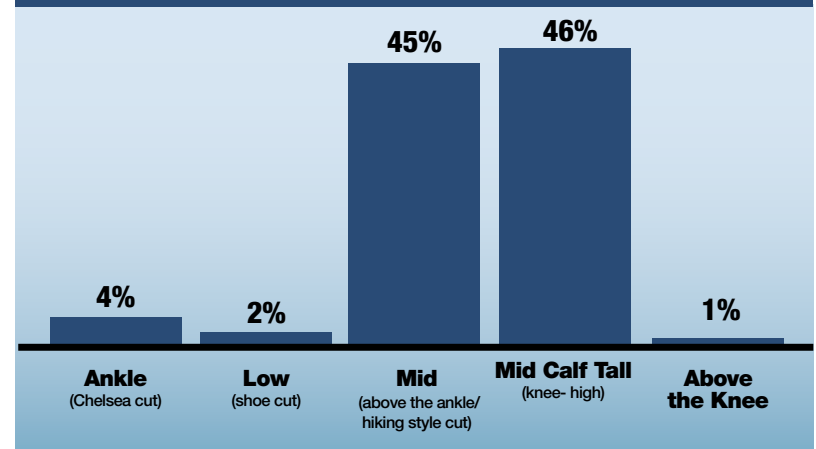
For fashion/winter boots I'm more concerned with style and price. For work boots I'd say comfort, safety and durability are my priority. **Female 35**

Weather boots I care more about function. For work boots I care more about durability, water-proof, weight. Casual boots, I care more about style. **Male 27**

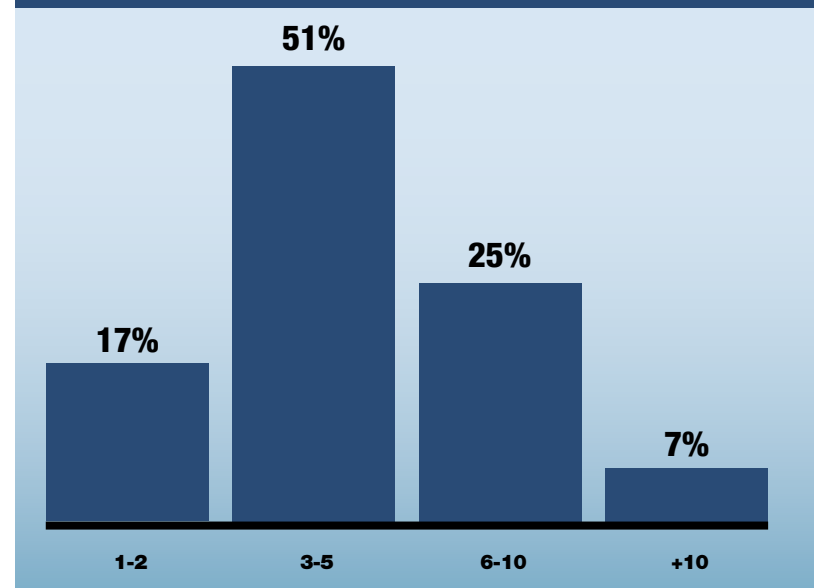
What height do you prefer for your fashion boots?



What height do you prefer for your rain boots or winter boots?



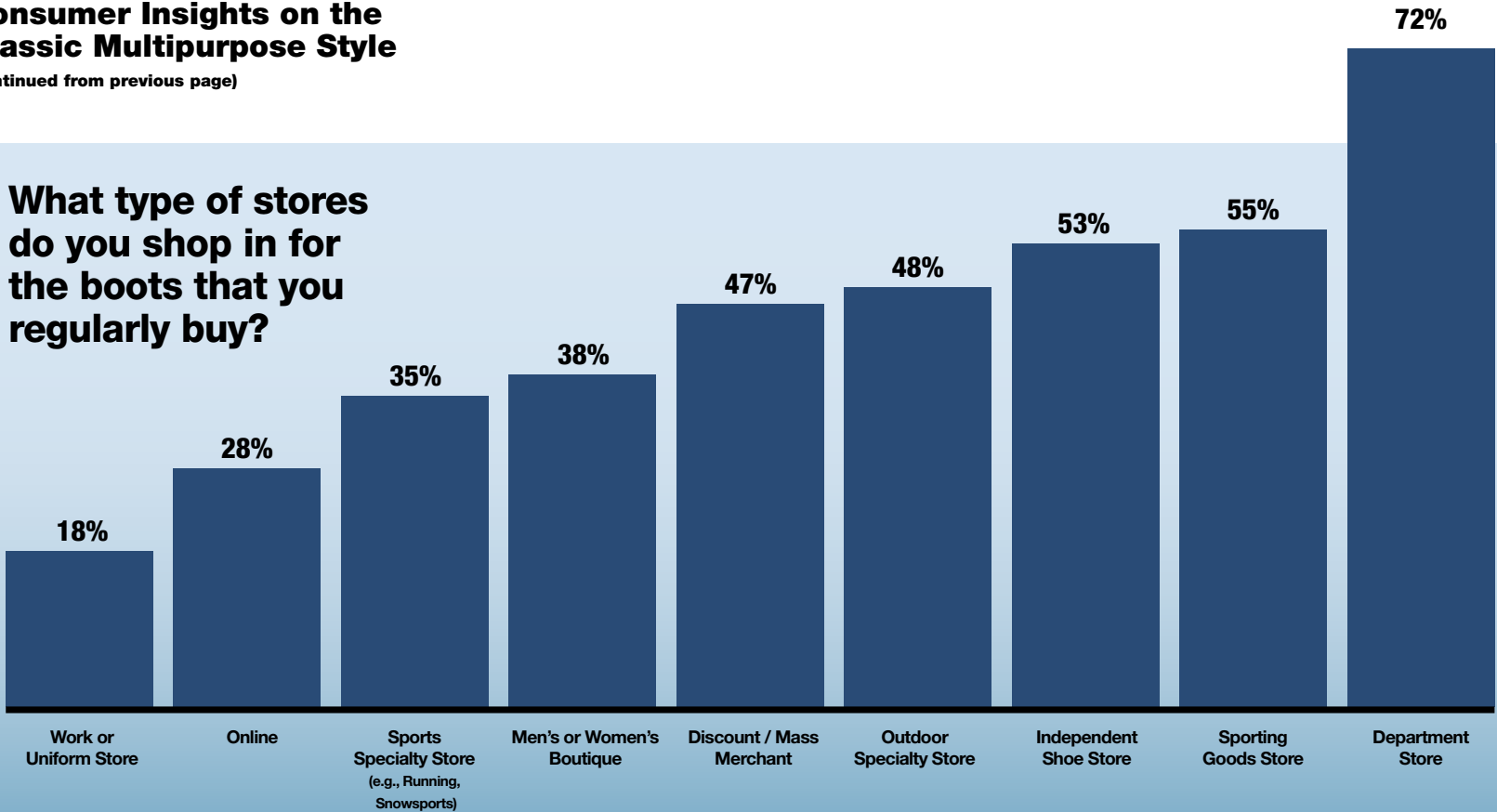
How many pairs of boots do you own?



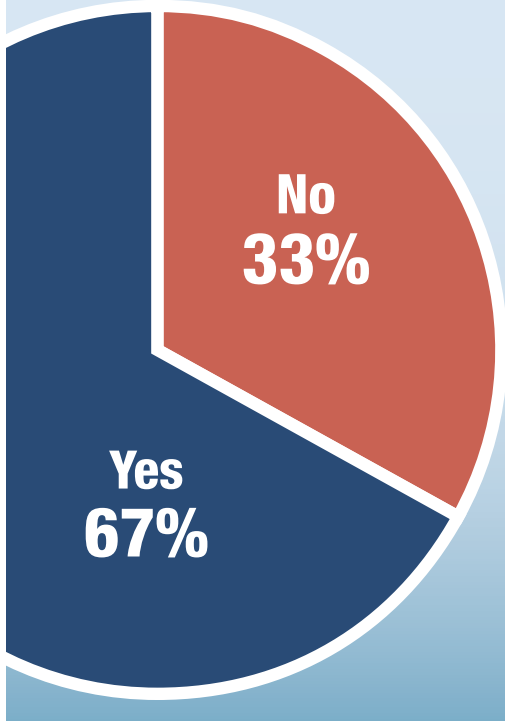
Consumer Insights on the Classic Multipurpose Style

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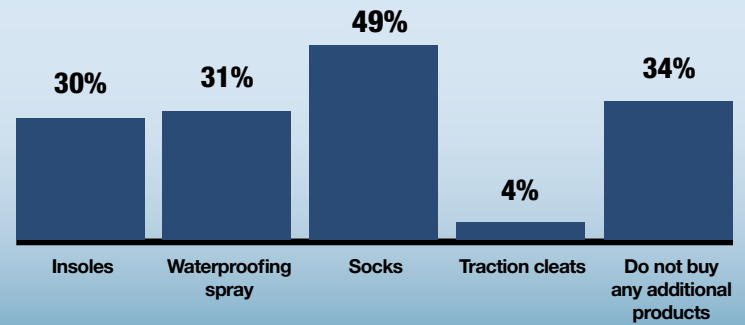
What type of stores do you shop in for the boots that you regularly buy?



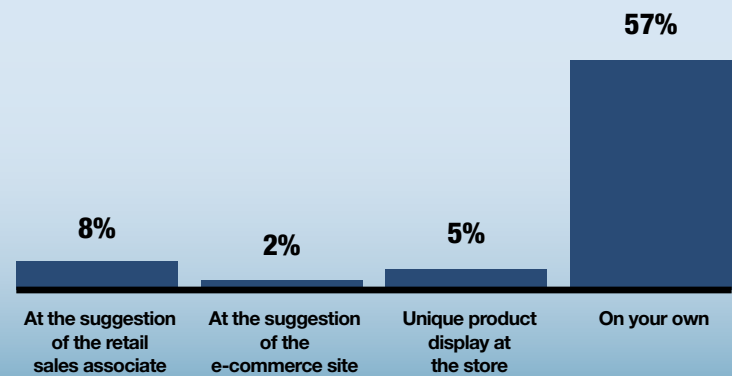
Do you go into a store with a particular style of boot in mind?



When shopping for a pair of boots, do you also purchase...



If you purchased additional items, did you select the items...



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Pendleton Waterproof Torngat Trail

This rain/cold weather lace-up boot pairs function and fashion seamlessly: Its rubber-traction outsole, waterproof leather and wool upper, which is in the brand's bold Spider Rock pattern, are accented by a faux shearling collar. **MSRP \$140.**



**CHAPTER 1
FASHION**

STYLE FOR ALL

WHETHER IT'S ANIMAL PRINTS ALL DAY OR COZY KNITS OR PLAID APLENTY, THERE'S A BOOT FOR EVERY MOOD THIS FALL.

There's a reason boots are perennially a fashion must for fall — there's one for every taste, as these Fall 2020 styles show. Looking for casual cool? Uptown style? Sneaker feel? Check, check, and check. Another reason boots top the list: There's no better or more versatile style to check all the boxes consumers are looking for. "The traditional categories of shoes are being transcended, people are demanding shoes that they can wear from the gym, to the office, and then to a dinner party," Rachel Carmi of Bernie Mev says. "If one of our designs can't be applied to more than one setting, then we don't move forward with the design. By understanding that today the lines

and boundaries between categories are blurred, we get more creative with our design and more intelligent about our market." Making styles that perform in all those different categories has spurred new functionality in classic fashion styles, making for the perfect marriage. That blend is fundamental to the entire brand ethos of Pendleton footwear as it enters its second fall season, according to VP of sales Margaret Doran. "We've combined high quality, functional footwear with the beauty and heritage of an iconic brand like Pendleton. It is an absolute standout in an otherwise crowded landscape where lots of boots and brands look the same."

BY JENNIFER ERNST BEAUDRY / PHOTOS BY FRANK JAMES

Dankso Chloe

Comfort, but make it cozy. The Chloe takes the foot cradling support of Dansko's iconic Professional Clog and adds a slouchy knit collar to give the style a warm, snuggly upgrade. **MSRP \$160.**





1



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6

1. Lifestride Kunis

The classic combat boot is hotter than ever. This refined, feminine take on the look keeps the lugged outsole and familiar silhouette, but makes it office-ready with an of-the-moment embossed croc upper and ribbon laces. **MSRP \$89.99.**

2. Remonte Chandra 54

With a sleek silhouette and short stacked heel, this lace-up boot is a classic, but it's anything but boring: Deep burgundy leather and tartan fabric upper panels add style; a removable insole, the substance. **MSRP \$145.**

3. Alegria Charlette

A rugged lugged outsole and classic harness boot details are all business. But Alegria's Charlette style flexes its softer side with graceful lines and a romantic, all-black embossed floral shaft. **MSRP \$189.95.**

4. Sporto Calynn

Sweater weather? This boot is ready. With a double dose of cozy thanks to the knit shaft and plaid-lined fold down upper, this weather-resistant style will go anywhere the day takes you. **MSRP \$59.99.**

5. Quoddy Chukka RL

Handcrafted in the brand's Lewistown, ME factory, this leather chukka is rugged and durable enough for the hard jobs and comfortable enough to take things easy. It gets its slipper-like feel from its moccasin construction, which wraps around the foot, and its breathable insole system. **MSRP \$300 and up.**

6. Propet Ford

Classic cap-toe styling in an on-trend chestnut hue are the goes-with-everything footnote every wardrobe needs. **MSRP \$99.95.**



1



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6

1. Vionic Kaylee Suede Knit Ankle Boot,

Sure, this boot boasts arch support and a biomechanically oriented construction, so it's comfortable all day — even with a heel. But it's the suede upper, refined almond-shaped toe and cozy knit collar that make this ankle boot in luxe cream winter white #goals. **MSRP \$169.95.**

2. Giorgio Brutini Houston

This men's hiker boot is functionable fashion personified: The pairing of a waterproof dress-boot upper with a flexible, athletic-inspired outsole looks fresh and stays comfortable all day. **MSRP \$59.99.**

3. Rieker Cordula 43

Sunny yellow makes everyone smile — pair it with an easy-wearing sneaker boot look and a textured, grippy outsole and you have a day-in, day-out winner. And don't be afraid of a gloomy forecast: the water-resistant Rieker Tex coating means these boots are good to go anytime. **MSRP \$115.**

4. Soft Comfort Jonelle Sweater Cuff Boot

A studded buckle detail and fold-over ribbed sweater cuff adds the oomph to this stacked heel women's look. And it's easy-on, easy-off thanks to a medial zip entry. **MSRP \$59.99.**

5. Soft Comfort Magono Lace Up Hiker

Classic hike style — check those D-rings and the faux-fur collar — makes for a versatile look that works all day. **MSRP \$59.99.**

6. Secret Celebrity Jennifer Cuffed Lug Bootie

Moto style is the name of the game for this ankle-height bootie. A faux shearing fold-down cuff and suede upper give a trend-right edge to a classic shape. **MSRP \$59.99.**

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CHAPTER 2 WORK/TACTICAL

ON THE JOB AND OFF THE CLOCK



There's a new breed of work boots in town. High-tech, high style, high comfort and high energy, they are designed to work 24/7, and when the job is done, they know how to walk away and play hard, too.

Fashionable and functional, the boots debuting in Fall 2020 have the look and lightweight feel of sneakers but with pumped-up protection. Lauren Poole, senior brand marketing manager for Wolverine, says that athletic shoes have become the standard point of reference in work boot design.

"People are demanding more performance and comfort in footwear regardless of category, and we recognize the importance of cushioning as a crucial component of performance and comfort as well as the durability demands in the work category," she says.

Today's workers expect more than

Bates Maneuver Side Zip DryGuard+ Thermo

Durable and performance-driven, this comfortable tactical boot features Bates' top technologies. It takes on the most demanding environments with a nylon and premium leather upper. An Ortholite insole and polyurethane core battle the fatigue that comes with long shifts; a Vibram outsole is key for traction in multiple conditions. **MSRP \$185.**

THESE BOOTS ARE TOUGH ON THE JOB SITE AND STYLISH ON THE TOWN. BY NANCY A. RUHLING

the standard safety features, according to Robin Skillings, senior director of global marketing for Keen Utility. “The market demands innovation, which encompasses materials, construction and design to produce better performance, lighter weight and optimal fit for every job,” he says.

One of those innovations is the new Keen.Bellows Flex technology that flexes, folds and bends to make knee-down tasks easier. “It addresses a need workers didn’t even know there could be a solution for,” Skillings says. “No more cracking or splitting leather at the high flexion point of work boots.”

Some of the innovations that brands are introducing are based on wearers’ feedback. David Mesicek, chief marketing officer at Honeywell Retail, the parent company of The Original Muck Boot Co. and Xtratuf, says Muck’s Apex style, which has a lighter silhouette for faster, more athletic pursuits, and Xtratuf’s Legacy, which pairs performance features with a more casual aesthetic, are direct results of extensive on-the-job-site research.

Ken Blanco, national VP of sales for Footwear Specialties, whose brands include Avenger, says that features are inspired by feedback from brand partners across work categories, including food processing, the oil industry and cement plants.

He points to the Avenger Breaker series, which features contemporary urban styling to appeal to a younger demographic.

“The market demands innovation, which encompasses materials, construction and design to produce better performance, lighter weight and optimal fit for every job.”

“Many of our top selling styles are in specialty work categories — puncture resistance, insulated, metatarsal guards and women’s — all directed by ongoing dialogue with our partners,” he says.

When it comes to the tactical category, consumers are looking for boots to do the long-haul heavy lifting, so it’s not surprising that safety and style are fusing.

“Today’s market is calling for more comfort and more functionality in a great price point under \$119,” says Brandy McCarty, chief merchandising officer for The Eastman Group, whose brands include Magnum. “This is key. Magnum is also answering the market demand in terms of coloration with the Coyote colorway really coming to life.”

Keith Carrato, VP and GM of Bates Footwear, adds that wearers are placing a priority on boots that can transition from work to home and back again. “They expect their boots to deliver uncompromising traction on any terrain and relentless durability — all while being incredibly comfortable for all-day wear.”



Ten years ago, Twisted X® revolutionized the western industry by offering “The Original” Driving Moc, the first casual profile for the western market.

Reebok Fusion Flexweave Work Shoe

Designed with an athletic silhouette, the Fusion Flexweave Work features a slip-resistant rubber outsole and a protective composite toe. The cage design of the shoe's upper has a unique look and provides added support. Beneath the cage, the upper is made from an Ultraknit and Flexweave combination for breathability. **MSRP \$134-\$142.**



JOB-FITTED

FOR ALL-DAY COMFORT

1

2

1. 51% WELT FOR ADDED HEEL STABILITY AND GREATER FLEX IN THE BALL OF THE FOOT WHERE YOU NEED IT THE MOST

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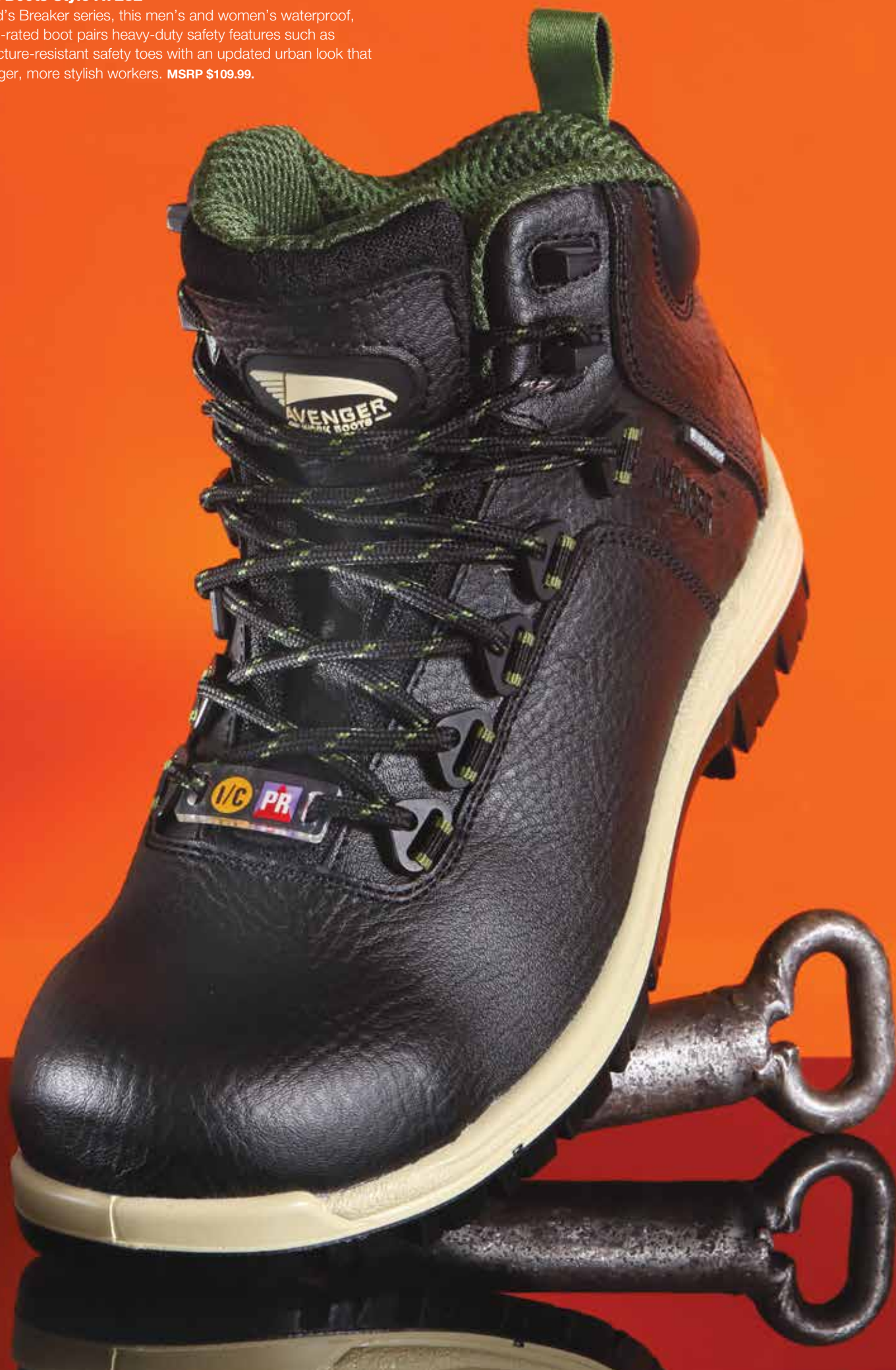
Wherever the site, whatever the job, Infinity FD delivers modern boot amenities and traditional Thorogood reliability that doesn't compromise comfort for performance. The patent pending Flex-drive rear-welt construction allows for maximum flex in the toe and superior construction. Paired with Flex-drive is our proprietary Anti-Fatigue high rebound sole that returns energy with every step. With zero break-in and weather defiant protection from the elements, the Infinity FD gives you peace of mind, comfort, and confidence so you can focus on a job well done.

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Avenger Work Boots Style A7282

Part of the brand's Breaker series, this men's and women's waterproof, electrical-hazard-rated boot pairs heavy-duty safety features such as lightweight, puncture-resistant safety toes with an updated urban look that appeals to younger, more stylish workers. **MSRP \$109.99.**



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BSTA Northeast Expo • Mar 1-2

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1. Dunlop Snugboot Pioneer

Engineered for comfort, this composite-toe boot provides the protection of a heavy-hitter (it has a slip-rated outsole, meets ASTM and EN requirements and has a lightweight, breathable, waterproof upper), but fits like a shoe. **MSRP \$149.99.**

2. Xtratuf Legacy Lace Boot

This 8-inch insulated, 100 percent waterproof boot deconstructs the brand's commercial-grade Legacy, which was designed to fit the needs of the Alaskan fishing community, and adds a full-grain waterproof leather upper to the original slip-resistant chevron outsole. Its built-in cushion insoles with arch support provide comfort on long shifts. **MSRP \$190.**

3. Muck Boot Co. Apex

This hard-working all-terrain boot for men and women offers all the brand's prime protection — it's 100 percent waterproof, has a high-traction outsole and a lock-down zipper closure system — on a lighter silhouette designed for faster, more athletic jobs. **MSRP \$140.**

4. Skechers Work Moltke

This men's waterproof, slip-resistant rain boot, which features rubber-coated neoprene and the brand's Air-Cooled Memory Foam, is designed for work and casual wear, too. **MSRP \$84.**

5. Coleman Tradesman

This entry-level boot combines great materials (leather) and quality construction (Goodyear welt) at a super-accessible price. **MSRP \$50.**

6. Wolverine Hellcat

With its supercharged performance cushioning and lightweight UltraSpring midsole, the durable Hellcat combines the comfort and moves of a sneaker with the chops of a traditional heavy-duty work boot. **MSRP \$165.**

7. Keen Utility Portland

This turbo-charged 6-inch industrial hiker, built in the brand's Portland factory, is made for the rough-and-tough jobs. Built like a sneaker and compliant with ASTM EH standards along with ASTM and Mark II non-slip standards, it comes with a ton of high-tech features that include the Keen.Bellows Flex ergonomically engineered system designed to flex and fold with up to three times less torque than other work boots on the market. **MSRP \$210.**

8. Timberland PRO Reaxion Mid Composite Safety Toe

This hiker-style, full-grain leather boot is made to work long shifts: Its composite toe is lightweight, its TPU-wrapped Aerocore midsole and Anti-Fatigue Technology keep feet comfortable and its moisture-wicking lining is breathable to keep feet odor-free. **MSRP \$160.**

9. Iron Age Footwear The Reinforcer

Designed for stone masons, concrete finishers, steelworkers and plumbers but worn by workers across the spectrum, the steel-toe wedge Reinforcer, which has a full-grain leather upper and the brand's ultra-comfortable BootBed memory foam footbed, works just as well off the job as on. **MSRP: \$121-\$132.**

10. Magnum Response III SZ WP

This waterproof non-metallic boot, which comes in a cool Coyote colorway, is packed with power. It hits all the trends: Tech-heavy yet lightweight; durable, breathable, comfortable, slip-resistant and scanner safe and most of all, perfectly priced. **MSRP: \$110.**



features.



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MEET THE FIRST NO SHOW WITH A CUSTOM-LIKE FIT

Bringing running technology into No Show socks.

CHAPTER 3 RAIN

STORMY WEATHER



Bogs Classic Casual Lace Leather Combining function and performance, the Classic Casual Lace Leather style is part of a collection of ankle- to mid-height boots for men and women that updates the brand's Classic boot, giving it a more lightweight, everyday look. It's also Bogs most sustainable collection, using recycled rubber, leather from tanneries rated gold by the Leather Working Group and recycled PET textiles, laces and binding. **MSRP \$120.**

Rain boots continue to make a splash, in bold colors and prints that can add accent to an everyday outfit without so much as compromising an inch of function. Stacy Cail, marketing director for Washington Shoe Co., parent company of the Chooka, Western Chief and Staheekum brands, says that wearers are looking for boots that express a sense of style — “whether it’s done through a print or a chunky platform outsole.”

She notes that Chooka has added a plaid to its collection and caters to “the woman looking for a classic style, a commuter shoe and something trendier.”

Western Chief brings several silhouettes and bright colors to the style mix this season. “It has a collection of tall rubber boots that fit a variety of calf widths that allow someone with a wide or athletic calf to still be able to wear a tall boot,” she says. “The adjustable back buckle allows for a customized fit.”

Rain boots not only have to weather the wet in style, but they also have to be easy to put on and take off.

“Wearability and versatility are key trends,” says Megan Vinton, director of product for Bogs. “That’s why we focused on easy low- to mid-heights, thoughtful and functional heel pulls as well as waterproof zippers, ultimately making these a time saver when you’re headed out the door for a weekend activity or a commute to work.”

RAINBOOT STYLES THAT DON'T RAIN ON YOUR STYLE PARADE. BY NANCY A. RUHLING



1. Western Chief Rain Drop Burst Vari-Fit

In eye-catching teal, this women's boot brightens the rainiest of days, and its gusset technology makes it a good fit for both slimmer and fuller calves. **MSRP \$45.**

2. Chooka Pret Plaid Moxee

Cut at a popular height, this women's boot walks through — and on — water in comfort and style: It features a soft fleece lining and feel-good Ortholite foam insoles that are removable and washable. **MSRP \$75.**

3. Sporto Delancy

Outfitted in a fashion-right plaid upper, this waterproof women's boot, which features a Thermolite lining and a comfort footbed, is the right price and style to make it easy to add several pair to the closet. **MSRP \$60.**

4. Staheekum Ankle Rain Shoe

Sleek and chic even in dry weather, this men's waterproof rain boot features a neoprene lining to keep feet warm. **MSRP \$75.**



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CHAPTER 4 OUTDOOR

ALL-AROUND PERFORMERS



The line between performance and lifestyle continues to blur in the outdoors as stylish boots are packed with tech details and core performers flash a fashionable aesthetic. Versatility — in style and performance — is often the No. 1 trait consumers are seeking in outdoor boots. “We’re seeing incredibly strong success with hiking shoes that appeal to the consumer who’s immersing in the outdoors as a lifestyle,” says Becky Marcelliano, outdoor marketing manager at Salomon. “Maybe they’re climbing peaks, or riding their bike to the bar, or planning a raft trip, or chasing the sunrise. The trend is in shoes and boots that can offer an everyday aesthetic with the fundamental technicality to allow them to adventure at the next rad opportunity.”

On the technical side, core performance styles are getting

Salomon Cross Hike Mid GTX

The completely new Cross Hike is ready for any conditions with multi-directional lugs, a seamless, closed-mesh construction and a waterproof Gore-Tex membrane. The mid-height style has a 20mm stack height and 10mm drop. **MSRP \$170.**

lighter, faster and more nimble, too. “More and more, people are continuing to trend towards lighter-weight, more athletic-feeling products for a range of outdoor activities,” notes Mark Mathews, VP of sales, Scarpa North America. “There is a lot of influence from running shoes and athletic footwear coming into the outdoor segment in shoes built for all-around trail use.” Whether they are being worn on the trail or the city sidewalk, these Fall 2020 boots are ready to rock.

BOOTS THAT DELIVER IN ANY ENVIRONMENT. BY CARA GRIFFIN

WORK BOOT 3.0



Workplace Styles: The intersection between dress, athletic/athleisure and office style. Urban functionality with built-in comfort + classic looks.



Our continuing coverage of work (boot) life beyond the construction site and the brands and retailers who make it work.

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: KIDS | MADE IN AMERICA

FOOTWEAR INSIGHT

ISSUE DATE: MARCH/APRIL 2020 **AD CLOSE MARCH 9**

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1. Bearpaw Boreal

Throwback color blocking gives the Boreal boot retro appeal to spare. But it's packed with enough completely modern features, including a removable Poron footbed, warm wool-blend lining and the brand's NeverWet waterproofing to make it hold its own on the slopes or around town. **MSRP \$84.99.**

2. Ecco Zipflex Mid

With a sole design inspired by a zipper, the Zipflex offers flexibility and comfort, as well as a distinctive aesthetic. Ecco's DriTan Leather technology, which significantly reduces the amount of water required for the tanning process, joins Dyneema Bonded Leather by Ecco in the upper. **MSRP \$200.**

3. Forsake Sophia Lace

The Sophia boot for women blends all-weather protection with sophisticated urban style. Premium full-grain leathers and waterproof/breathable membrane offer performance; the internal wedge adds comfort and style. **MSRP \$174.95.**

4. Oboz Bozeman Mid Leather Pull-on

The women's Bozeman pull-on style combines technical trail performance with mountain-town style. It has 3.5mm rubber lugs and a supportive TPU heel cup. Bozeman Collection styles also feature a new O-Fit Insole made with Bloom Algae Foam. **MSRP \$140.**

5. Scarpa Rush Mid GTX

This do-it-all trail shoe pairs trail-running inspired design with the support and protection of a light, waterproof hiker. It features the brand's new Interactive Kinetic System (IKS), a sole with five concave impact zones that compress and absorb energy as they contact the ground, allowing secondary lugs to then come in contact with the trail to increase traction. **MSRP \$179.**

6. Vasque Alechemist XT UD

The Alchemist Extended-Terrain UltraDry is a modern hiker that delivers durability and protection with less bulk. It is designed to keep feet comfortable and ready for any adventure. **MSRP \$140.**

COMFORT REINVENTED

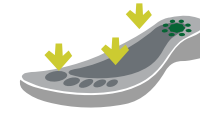
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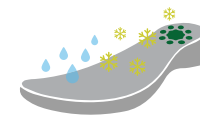
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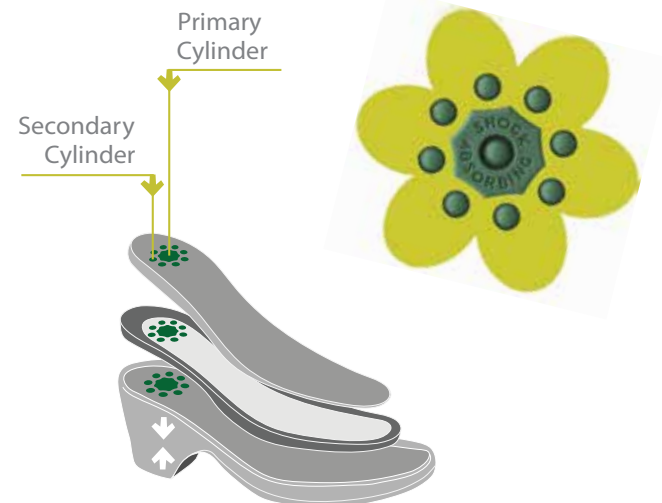
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insoles you will feel
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on feathers.





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1. Ecco Solice High

This stylish women's offering from Ecco features the first footwear application of Primaloft Bio, a 100 percent recycled, biodegradable synthetic fiber insulation that adds warmth, and when combined with Hydromax, guards against winter's tough elements. This style is at home on the slopes or in the city. **MSRP \$200.**

2. Thorogood Infinity FD Series 9" Drakar

This waterproof, insulated outdoor boot features Thorogood's patent pending FLEX-DRIVE 51 percent welt construction allowing for maximum flex in the toe and enhanced heel stability. An anti-fatigue energy return system works to absorb shock. **MSRP \$210.**

3. Khombu Swift

Inspired by the U.S. Ski. Team, this women's style for Fall 2020 offers a combination of fashion and function, taking the sneaker boot to next level. It offers the brand's K-Guard weather protection, a K-Grip bottom and a Comfort Flex Insole. **MSRP \$69.99.**

4. Twisted X MHKBW02

This 11" waterproof boot features both Mossy Oak Bottomland Camo and Twisted X's eco-conscious ecoTWX material, made with recycled plastic water bottles. The brand's CellSole tech in the footbeds offers comfort and the outsole is oil- and slip-resistant.

5. Hi-Tec V-Lite V-Lite Shift I +

The brand makes its entrance into the lightweight speed hiking market with this lightweight, value-oriented boot. It has the brand's MD Traction Outsole and Comfort Insole and features i-Shield water and stain resistance. **MSRP \$79.99.**

6. Khombu Marcus

An urban hiker for men, the Marcus combines performance and casual style. It features the brand's K-Guard weather protection, a K-Grip bottom and a Comfort Flex Insole. **MSRP \$79.99.**

david tate

S H O E S



SIZES & WIDTHS
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4 - 13

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Feetured Players

By Bob McGee

For Feetures, business is a family affair. And for 2020, the Hickory, NC-based sock brand is preparing for its newest frontier: expanding its sock story in the independent shoe store channel in a significant way.

The brand was founded in 2002 by Hugh Gaither, a 27-year veteran of the Ridgeview sock and hosiery company, who saw an opening in the market for a better premium, technical performance sock. Today, the Gaither team at Feetures includes sons John Gaither, the SVP of product, and Joe Gaither, the VP of marketing, as well as daughter Catherine, who works as an executive assistant. Working together, the Gaithers have built the brand into a run specialty powerhouse: 50 percent of the firm's business is done in the channel, and it's consistently a top seller in run shops.

"The edge we have in this highly competitive business is that we're completely focused on socks," John Gaither says. "It's the first thing we think about every day and the last thing as well. We are completely focused on moving the category forward and finding new ways to innovate, and I think that's what really resonates in the retail marketplace."

And this year, the Gaithers want to bring that focus to the footwear channel in an even bigger way. It's no newcomer: the brand has

Running Channel Stalwart Feetures Sees Opportunities in the Footwear Independent Channel

had a presence in the independent market since the 2016 launch of its Everyday product, its first foray into a more casual line.

"Three years ago, we made a major update to our product line and created the Everyday product. The idea was that we were going to take our running sock technology to socks designed for dress and casual use, bring performance to that category and create some differences," Joe Gaither says. "We thought there was an opportunity to use and create a synthetic dress sock line — it's moisture-wicking with different fibers — and use the compression and fit that makes our performance socks so unique in the running market."

It was a formula, they say, that resonated.

"When we began to introduce ourselves in footwear stores that we did not have distribution in, they understood our success in the run market," Hugh Gaither says. "And that gave us an immediate level of credibility."

Today, the Everyday line has grown to include a variety of lifestyle socks in a variety of weights and patterns, with 33 men's styles and 41 for women, and has placement in shoe accounts including Schuler Shoes, Footwear Etc., Dardano's, Alan's Shoes, Karavel Shoes, and Comfort One. And it sees an opportunity to grow that share.

For its 2020 push, Feetures promoted an in-house sales

representative to solely focus on the footwear channel and has established a series of grassroots events to establish more brand traction and build store traffic for the Everyday range and the entire sock segment. A program, created with approximately 30 footwear stores in Fall 2019 will be expanded in 2020. It centers on creating weekend store sales events, similar to a trunk show where customers who show up to try on a pair of shoes can receive a new pair of Feetures.

Key to the initiative is the with the February introduction of the Everyday No Show line of low-cut socks for men and women, with 15 SKUs styles retailing at \$14.99.

The channel is a natural fit, Joe Gaither says, because the specialty market consumer is looking for product with real benefits — and the independent channel has the right model to demonstrate it to them. The try-on and fitting experience in store by educated staff associates, he says, is crucial. "In a big box environment where customers are self-shopping, it's much harder to tell the difference between a \$16 sock and a 12-pack for \$15. The benefits are certainly explained on the package," Joe Gaither says. "But it's really hard for some consumers to understand that value proposition without someone there to explain it or the ability to try on the sock." ●



Elite Light Cushion No Show (top) and Men's Everyday Ultra Light Triangle Park Crew Navy.



Left to right: John, Hugh and Joe Gaither.

CAMPAIGN SEASON

These three brand + celeb partnerships have us intrigued...



Fila x BTS

All seven members of the uber-popular South Korean pop group BTS are pictured wearing classic white Fila tees and hoodies with the Fila linear logo in the first image released from the **“One World, One Fila!”** brand campaign. BTS signed on as global brand ambassadors for the brand last October and the new campaign dropped in January.

Reebok x Conor McGregor

MMA star Conor McGregor is the marketing face of Reebok’s biggest shoe drop of 2020 — the new Zig Kinetica, with a new campaign that features McGregor transforming into an action figure through the “power of Zig.” It is the next phase in Reebok’s **“Sport the Unexpected”** campaign, which the brand says celebrates “bold risk takers.” The \$120 Zig Kinetica shoe has a distinct zigzag-shape and an energy-return sole.

DFNS x Nigel Sylvester

Pro BMX athlete Nigel Sylvester has been tapped as the official brand ambassador for DFNS, an Amsterdam-based company that specializes in **sustainable apparel and footwear protectors**. Foot Locker is among the retailers carrying the brand’s products, which target the sneaker-loving crowd, and include a sneaker cleaning kit, footwear protection spray and apparel laundering product. Sylvester will partner with the brand to develop his own collection of DFNS travel care essentials and will support product announcements across the DFNS range.





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VAN HEUSEN



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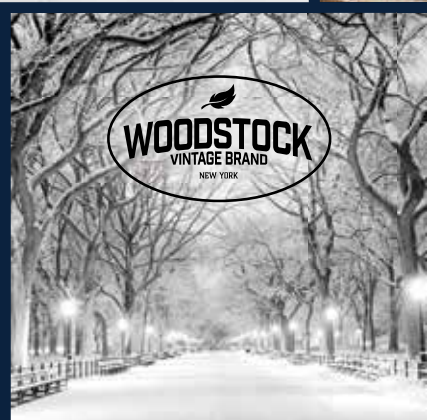
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