

TOP INNOVATORS

At each of the stores in the program, readers have been placed at the back and front of the store. Tags are read in the backroom when merchandise arrives — eliminating the need to open boxes to identify their contents — read again after merchandise moves to the sales floor, and read a third time at point of sale, and quantities are adjusted accordingly in the system. Both store personnel and company management can view inventory levels to determine what items need to be reordered or replenished on the sales floor.

Item-level RFID is providing sales associates with accurate, real-time inventory information in one place, which enables them to better manage Soma's deep merchandise assortment, drive increased sales and, with more confidence in inventory accuracy, ensure shopper satisfaction.

By incorporating RFID reads into backend systems weekly, rather than monthly or bi-annually, Chico's FAS, Inc. can improve the flow of inventory from the distribution center to the store and streamline the replenishment process.

Soma has improved inventory accuracy to 95 percent, including full-store inventory count, and the increased visibility into daily shipment receipts has reduced out-of-stocks, said Silay.

That customer looking for the matching panties? Well, now that's not a problem. Soma is also using the technology to quickly find products in the store that customers are unable to locate, or to track down merchandise requested from another Soma store. With a high level of visibility into inventory in each store, Soma is achieving a much higher level of customer satisfaction — and higher sales.

— Jordan K. Speer

Timberland

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

NOMINATED BY: Omni United USA | www.omni-united.com and Promoboxx | www.promoboxx.com

You might say Timberland has really put the rubber to the road lately — literally and figuratively. The outdoor heritage brand, owned by VF Corp., is innovating across product and marketing in a way that draws customers to its brand while (or perhaps because of) focusing on its mission to do well by doing good.

Hitting the Road with Timberland Tires: In November, Timberland announced a partnership with tire company Omni United to create a more sustainable lifecycle for rubber whereby fewer tires end up in landfills and less virgin rubber gets used in footwear, says Margaret Morey-Reuner, director of strategic partnerships and business development, Timberland. "Timberland Tires represent a new model in tire innovation: a sustainable, tire-to-shoe lifecycle," she says. The tires, made in the United States and positioned at the premium end of the market, are designed and created for superior performance and safety on the road, using a rubber formulation that is appropriate for recycling. At the end of their useful life as tires, they will take on a second life as part of the outsole of a Timberland boot or shoe, rather than ending up in landfills. (You can read about this, and other interesting footwear partnerships, in the April issue of *Apparel*.)

The use of recycled rubber from Timberland Tires is just the most recent in mate-



rials innovation for the company, and goes hand in hand with its goal to reduce the environmental impacts of doing business. In 2013, for example, 70 percent of all Timberland footwear shipped incorporated recycled, organic or renewable materials; the company has also given more than 128 million plastic bottles a new life through the use of recycled PET in its footwear, says Morey-Reuner.

A Journey with Hazel Highway: In other non-traditional marketing approaches for the company, last fall also saw the launch

of an interesting social media campaign around its new Hazel Highway Collection, which features four classic Timberland silhouettes inspired by the original leather used in 1979 to build the first Super Boot, an iconic style for the brand.

The campaign tells the story of a journey down I-95, capturing the industrial roots and rustic heritage of the Timberland brand along the way. To get the word out to both its retail customers and end consumers, Timberland created a wide variety of social posts from which its dichotomous retailer base — ranging from outdoor to urban based retailers — could choose, says Cassie Heppner, director of North America wholesale marketing, Timberland. To facilitate the process of sharing assets, Timberland worked with Promoboxx, a brand-to-retail marketing platform that enables its clients to launch online campaigns and share directly with their retail partners.

"We created a range of targeted content for the Hazel Highway campaign, which was made available through Promoboxx's digital marketing platform," says Heppner. "Retailers who access Timberland's content through Promoboxx utilized the share functionality to select and push content out to their social channels. Whether retailers wanted to post images of the boot in an urban or rural setting, focus on the limited availability of the product, or show the detail

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of its leather, there were plenty of options that met their marketing needs," she said.

Another challenge for the company was reaching new audiences, as well as online followers. To do this, Timberland enabled Promoboxx's Match incentive program. The program rewards retailers for taking action within the platform (sharing the campaign on Facebook, Twitter, etc.) with local mobile ads, says Heppner. These ads, using geo-targeting technology, appear on customers' phones and tablets, simultaneously pro-

moting Hazel Highway and the nearby retailer, while driving in-store traffic.

Within less than a month of launching the program, Timberland received more than 1.3 million impressions and a .35 percent click rate, which Heppner reports is well above the industry average of about .25 percent. "We could tell retailers loved the mobile ads," said Heppner, "because when Timberland mentioned the new incentive in their emails to retailers, the email open rate reached

81 percent, blowing out our email open rates for previous campaigns."

"By launching targeted content, as well as incentivizing retailers to share our campaign via a new local mobile channel, we succeeded not only in appealing to Timberland's broad retailer base, but also in reaching new customers and driving traffic in-store," she concluded.

— Jordan K. Speer

Vestagen Technical Textiles Inc.

Orlando, Fla. | www.vestagen.com | vestexprotects.com

NOMINATED BY: Self

The recent cases of Ebola among medical professionals here in the United States and the ongoing struggle to combat the virus in Africa are a stark reminder of just how important appropriate procedures and protective wear can be when you're dealing with a life-threatening disease.

That's not news to Vestagen Technical Textiles. In February 2014, the company obtained the exclusive global medical textile rights to three patented technologies and applied all three technologies to one fabric, creating VESTEX®, a fabric that is simultaneously fluid repellent, antimicrobial and breathable. In fact, VESTEX has been clinically proven¹ to reduce the acquisition and retention of pathogens on the fabric.

Why stop there? After all, healthcare is the fastest growing sector of the U.S. economy, employing more than 18 million workers. Last June, Vestagen decided to manufacture VESTEX, under the myGuardian™ brand, into healthcare worker apparel, seeing the benefits it could provide in protecting nurses from the body fluid exposures they regularly encounter. Research documenting the effectiveness and safety of VESTEX includes a study performed in a hospital setting which showed a 99.99 percent reduction of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) on VESTEX uniforms compared to traditional non-protective uniforms, both at the beginning and end of the work shift¹.

"Healthcare is among the most dangerous jobs in the U.S. because workers don't know what has colonized their patients. Additionally, splashes or splatters of a patient's blood and body fluids are a reality of healthcare delivery," says Uncas "Ben" B. Favret III, CEO of Vestagen.

VESTEX is also available for licensing so that other manufacturers can obtain the technology for healthcare workers, as well as for people in other fields who need similar protection. Recently, the largest online retailer of scrub apparel, allheart.com, launched its own line of scrubs with VESTEX Protection.

By creating VESTEX, Vestagen also created a new product category, "Active Barrier Apparel," says Favret. The active barrier refers to combined effect of the fluid repellency, which keeps fluids from reaching the skin and undergarments, with an antimicrobial, which kills the germs left behind, he says.

For scenarios in which there is anticipated risk of exposure, such as procedures occurring in the operating room, healthcare workers wear Personal Protective Equipment, or PPE, which includes full body suits. However, there are many more scenarios in which there is an unknown level of risk. Active Barrier Apparel filled what Favret says was a "gap in protection" for healthcare workers.



Since the launch of its healthcare worker apparel, the company has added patient apparel with VESTEX protection, under the myComfort™ brand. Most recently, the company launched scrubs that are specially designed for operating room (OR) staff, made with tightly woven, 100 percent polyester to limit lint shedding, and wicking WarpDry™ technology to ensure breathability and wearer comfort throughout what are often very long OR procedures. The new OR scrubs joined the full line of protective healthcare worker lab coats and scrubs under the myGuardian™ brand.

The ultimate goal is to offer healthcare workers and patients protection from germs — as well as peace of mind, Favret concludes.

— Jordan K. Speer

¹ Bearman GM, Rosato A, Elam K, et al. A crossover trial of antimicrobial scrubs to reduce methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* burden on healthcare worker apparel. *Infect Control Hosp Epidemiol.* 2012;33:268–275.

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with a community that “loves to debate ‘Dress Pant Yoga Pants,’ ‘Black Sheep Sweaters,’ ‘Space Jackets,’ ‘Gay Jeans,’ and shirts with ‘Poo Emojis’ all over them,” says Hogue. Other popular designs have included Executive Hoodies (which came about in response to a particular company’s IPO), ‘Chef Jeans’ for Chris Cosentino, and an adult onesie designed by comedienne Margaret Cho.

The earlier a customer funds a design, the greater the discount offered. After a style has been crowdfunded, it becomes available for sale — at full price — to others who want to get in on the action. To date, the Straight Leg/Gray Dress Pant Yoga Pant is the site’s most popular item ever:

as of press time it had achieved 10,408 percent funding, since hitting 100 percent funding on Jan. 17, 2014. The company’s crowdfunding goal is to meet production minimums and fund the production. Betabrand produces enough inventory to cover its projected demand for about four to five months, says Hogue.

Betabrand, founded by Chris Lindland in 2009 (prior to that it was called Cor-darounds, which got its start in 2005), sells primarily online, but also has a flagship store at its San Francisco headquarters. Also awesome: 70 percent of Betabrand clothes are made in the United States (in San Francisco and Oakland), with the balance produced in China, Korea and Thailand.

The Betabrand model really turns retailing on its head by putting the power of design and production decisions in the hands of the customer, while eliminating the challenge of forecasting demand, says Hogue. It also solves the problem of raising capital for manufacturing, as customers have paid for the cost of production before it even starts. “This is the future of the apparel industry,” she says.

“I have worked in the garment industry for more than 25 years and for more than a dozen companies, both big and small. Betabrand is by far the most innovative company I have ever worked with,” she concludes.

— Jordan K. Speer

Mizuno Running

Atlanta, Ga. | www.mizuno.com

NOMINATED BY: Promoboxx | www.promoboxx.com

Can you name one thing that alone could potentially boost U.S. GDP by \$25 billion, eliminate the smoking of more than 48 million cigarettes daily, decrease homelessness by 46 percent, increase earning potential by 10 percent and eliminate \$143 billion in health care costs in the United States?

Stumped? According to Mizuno, the answer is running.

That’s the conclusion the 109-year-old company came to after it posed the question: “Can running really transform the world?” and then set out to find out, partnering with the University of North Carolina Kenan-Flagler Business School to conduct a statistical analysis to determine how running can change the world in positive ways.

Drawing on the thought-provoking statistics that resulted from its research, Mizuno then debuted its “What If Everybody Ran” campaign online in March 2014 to inspire consumers by demonstrating the potential power of running to transform lives, and society as a whole.

Via social media, using the hashtag #IfEverybodyRan, Mizuno promoted the analysis results, including such gems as “7 billion more hours spent outside,” “63 million happier dogs,” “14 billion fewer hours spent online,” and “135 million more victory beers.”

Findings from the analysis were promoted primarily online but the campaign also included an in-store component at independent running retailers across the United States.

Using Promoboxx, a brand-to-retail digital marketing platform, Mizuno distributed digital content promoting #IfEverybodyRan to more than 300 of its retail customers across the country.



The platform enabled the specialty running shops to spread the #IfEverybodyRan message in their local communities through Facebook, Twitter, email and on their respective websites.

Additionally, via the Mizuno Baton mobile app, consumers were able to transform the power of running into community action by promising to donate \$1 for every mile run with the app to Back on My Feet, a nonprofit organization that helps those experiencing homelessness turn their lives around through running. (That 46 percent figure above? Not hypothetical. Since its founding in 2007, 46 percent of residential members (the homeless) have moved themselves forward with a job, a house, or both.) Via the app, the company raised more than \$90,000 for the organization.

During the initial launch month (March 2014), “Mizuno experienced 110 percent growth in U.S. unique visitors to its website compared to March 2013 traffic, its Facebook followers increased by more than 25 percent in the first two weeks following the launch of the campaign and Twitter engagement increased by 121 percent in March 2014 vs. February 2014,” says Kim Hoey, Mizuno USA’s running division brand marketing director. ▶

If everybody ran, there could be 20 million more great grandmothers, 60 million more pounds of pasta eaten, 37 percent more smiles and 27 million more sunrises viewed per week. "It all starts with one more run," says Hoey.

Last month, the company launched its 2015 campaign, "Every Mile Changes You," which evolves the "What if Everybody Ran" campaign in its goal to inspire more running across the nation. The campaign will continue to support Back on My Feet, and also will provide running apparel and shoes to a group of military vet-

erans called "The Shepherd's Men." This team will be running 911 miles in eight days to raise funds and awareness for SHARE Military Initiative, which provides free individualized treatment and counseling to veterans struggling with traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder suffered during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001.

— Jordan K. Speer

Kathmandu

Christchurch, New Zealand | www.kathmandu.co.nz

NOMINATED BY: JustEnough | www.justenough.com

Founded 25 years ago, Kathmandu has grown from a small retailer of outdoor clothing and equipment to "a global brand that designs trusted outdoor gear so our customers can live their dreams of travel and adventure," says CIO Jolann Van Dyk.

Paying attention to customer demand has helped Kathmandu grow into a vertically-integrated business that operates 158 stores across New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom, and a growing e-commerce channel. With an eye on expansion, the company is scoping out international markets such as North America and Europe.

Not long ago, it became evident that existing legacy systems were no longer able to deliver against its business growth strategies, said CIO Jolann Van Dyk. "Systems were either too slow, required significant time and effort to perform basic day-to-day tasks, [were] rigid, unsupported or just antiquated."

More specifically, these solutions didn't support systemized forecasting and planning. Historically, the company managed these processes on multiple Excel spreadsheets, which required manual revisions that were almost impossible to keep synchronized across disparate spreadsheets. It was a time-intensive and inefficient process that lacked the functionality needed to manage an increasingly global company.

During a routine business planning session, listening to the strategic objectives of executives from each business area, it became clear that the company's current business systems could not deliver against their requirements, Van Dyk recalled.

With an eye on assortment range planning, Kathmandu began its search for a technology partner. The company sought a system that would reduce the risks associated with forecasting and planning knowledge, deliver timeliness of data entry and availability, and manage accurate information so that the retailer could make informed business decisions. From an architecture standpoint, it wanted a stable environment with limited required configurations and modifications; the system also had to align with the chain's best practices.

Kathmandu found its ideal solution from JustEnough, Irvine, Calif. The solution's functionality, including having all data in a



centralized location, was a very attractive feature. Its status as a Microsoft independent software vendor (ISV) partner was also a plus, as all future versions of the product will integrate with Microsoft Dynamics AX enterprise resources planning software, which will streamline upgrades.

Kathmandu added the hosted infrastructure-as-a-service (IAAS) cloud-based platform in phases. For example, the assortment planning tool went live in September 2013, followed by item planning in January 2014, and allocations and replenishment in October 2014. Already, Kathmandu has gained better visibility of its operating stock requirements, which is leading to better planning practices around assortment range planning, option count and product lifecycle, says Van Dyk. "Our planners also have more information available to make more informed decisions."

Van Dyk noted that one of the biggest results the chain has achieved is a significant reduction in overall stock holdings; insights provided by the solution enable it to purchase smarter, he says.

Its full-speed-ahead momentum continues, as the company looks to achieve better space management and just-in-time replenishment, with architecture that can better manage stock throughput and add boundaries to deal with out-of-stock exceptions, rather than having to troll through all data and traffic to understand product movement.

More immediately, the company is focused on embedding its new core business systems and unlocking the next stage in business capability, Van Dyk concluded.

— Deena M. Amato-McCoy