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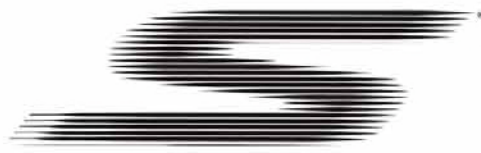
Closet Busting

Styles For Spring '17

Cool Casual

Surf Looks Hit the Street

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Some of our favorite new footwear with unique Made in America stories to tell.

Cover: Jamie Kent wearing Durango boots. Above: Rockport.

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THE SERVICE ECONOMY

I AM OFTEN ASKED WHY I WRITE SO MUCH ABOUT THE SERVICE IN STORES. Mainly it is because service is the one factor retailers can control in this crazy world in which we find ourselves.

Service is also one facet of business where retailers can compete and win. My father and my wife's dad were both small restaurant owners, so we both grew up in small business families. We learned at an early age that good service could overcome bad roast beef, lumpy mashed potatoes and undercooked vegetables.

Because of that upbringing, my wife and I are discerning diners. We are very appreciative of good service because we realize how difficult it is to deliver day in and day out.

The question facing retailers today is whether good service can overcome 24/7 competition from Amazon, brands selling direct through their websites and a consumer base that is alternatively frightened, angry, bored and sated?

I, of course, say it can. Good service at retail is the ultimate trump card. Service at shoe stores is an intimate personal experience. Combine that with the fact that purchases of footwear and apparel are very emotionally based, which means retailers have the opportunity to create memorable and meaningful experiences in their stores every day.

Those factors prompted us to create The Gold Medal Service Awards, which honor and recognize the stores that offer high quality sit-and-fit service. The second annual Gold Medal Award winning retailers are featured starting on page 20.

The Gold Medal story also features insight from the three stores that perhaps should be designated as Platinum Award winners as they scored a perfect 100 in our mystery shopping evaluation. Reading their comments makes it abundantly clear how much work goes into delivering great service. We hope the Gold Medal Awards will make retailers realize that all the work is worth it. ●

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INSPIRATION

Spreading a Message of Hope



Tom Finigan, sons Will and Alec, OOFOS exec Duncan Finigan and son Duncan.

Spend a few minutes with longtime shoe industry executive Duncan Finigan and her enthusiasm and passion for her family, athleticism and job as a senior marketing executive for OOFOS Footwear becomes abundantly clear. OOFOS is a five-year old recovery footwear brand founded by a quartet of former Reebok executives — Steve Liggett, Lou Panaccione, Paul Brown and Juan Diaz.

What is not transparent during a brief conversation with this former 19-year Reebok marketing executive is her health — that she has been living with metastatic, or Stage 4, breast cancer for more than 18 months.

Finigan came to grips with her prognosis a year ago, using her steely determination to shift her business focus to what she could do for cancer research and others with the disease and how that could be incorporated into OOFOS' marketing and product initiatives.

One important result comes into the view of retailers and consumers in October, coinciding with national Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Project Pink will aim to raise \$100,000 for cancer research at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, specifically the hospital's women's oncology department headed by Finigan's physician, Dr. Eric Weiner. Cohasset, MA-based OOFOS will donate \$5 from every pair of its six Project Pink styles sold through Oct. 31. Before expanding the program to its 1500 accounts consisting of sports specialty and comfort shoe stores, OOFOS launched Project Pink with four styles last year with less fanfare.

While Finigan's desire to help fund a cure for metastatic breast

cancer is personal, her ambition to raise consumer awareness about the comfort and recovery characteristics of OOFOS is equally important to her. She recalls the brand's early days when many were skeptical about the prospects for the recovery footwear category despite in-store "recovery-themed" successes in nutrition and hydration, and how those opinions have gradually changed.

One retailer told her "recovery footwear" has been the best-performing new category in his store in the last three-and-a-half years. Another said his sales (of OOFOS footwear) has all been incremental business.

Getting the message out is what's important to Finigan. With OOFOS, especially to the active 22- to 35-year old set, who might find themselves able to do the workouts they want in later years if they take care of their bodies, and especially feet, now.

Last month, Finigan took her other important missive to the bikeways of Massachusetts, participating in the annual, 200-mile Pan Mass Challenge with her sons Will, Alec and Duncan, husband Tom and Dr. Weiss for Team WOW (Women's Oncology on Wheels) with all donations raised by the squad of doctors, nurses, patients and patient families earmarked for Dana-Farber's oncology department. The event, on course to raise \$46 million this year when the fundraising books close Oct. 1, has raised more than \$546 million over its 37-year history.

Satisfied but wanting more, Finigan is hopeful her dual-tracked mission to contribute more to a cure for cancer and the recovery of people's feet, in whatever they do on a daily basis, collide this month with the success of Project Pink. — *By Bob McGee*

ROLL RELEASE RECOVER

The new TriggerPoint CORE™ Foam Roller rolls away muscle tension that prevents you from feeling good and moving well.



 **TRIGGERPOINT**

MARKETING

The Obozmobile Retail Tour

Sitting in a meeting room staring at white boards, color swatches, sample sizes and CAD drawings can only get you so far in footwear development. Sometimes you have to take to the streets.

This summer, Oboz, the relatively small, but growing, brand of outdoor footwear born in Bozeman, MT, took one of its top product developers out of the office and put him in a Dodge ProMaster Sprinter van, sending him out for more than 150 days on the road across every region in the U.S.

Captain of the Obozmobile, Dave Dolph has more than 17 years of experience in the footwear industry. He's been hitting retail and consumer events all summer, often pairing his "Shoes 101" clinics with dealer outings, getting the shoes dirty in the way they are actually meant to be used — outdoors. And importantly, he's not a salesperson, which retailers say is an exciting change of pace for a brand visit.

According to Oboz sales manager Christian Mason, retailers become comfortable when they know that Dave is there not to sell, but to train. "When I see staff's eyes light up and they start asking questions, that's a sign they've learned something and want to know more," says Mason. "Dave's footwear experience carries a lot of weight."

The Obozmobile concept was partially inspired by Oboz founder and



On the road and closer to its real life customers

The Oboz van.

president John Connelly's early days of visiting retailers, where he personally visited up to 100 retailers a year. But the concept is also inspired by what other folks in the industry have always done: the reps who spend 200 days a year on the road; the IMBA Trail Care Crew; Klean Kanteen's festival circuit; *Backpacker Magazine's* Get Out More tour. "We simply adapted these practices to leverage all the tech out of my head, and into an extraordinarily deep and relevant training for our retail partners," says Dolph. — *By Aaron H. Bible* ●

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TECHY DESIGN

Freestyle Is a 'Cool' New Line



Coolway's Freestyle line includes the Hightail.

THE YORGA GROUP, WHICH IMPORTS THE COOLWAY LINE FROM Spain, has developed a brand called Freestyle that it says combines design and technology.

Freestyle by Coolway targets men and women 18-to-25-years-old with a collection that was designed by a guy who admits he doesn't like wearing shoes at all.

Carlos Mayordomo, part of the third generation of the family that owns Coolway, says he has never worn a brown shoe in his life because he never liked the feeling of wearing shoes and always felt confined. He created the Freestyle by Coolway line with the end goal of having a shoe that would have "a naked fit."

The design philosophy includes several developments with colorful names, including Marshmallow, which the company describes as a mix of EVA and injectable rubber that absorbs impact and spreads pressure; Feetnes, a low destiny polyurethane which is described as accommodating foot proportions, spreading pressure throughout the foot and shoe; and Freshcheese, a combination of rubber and EVA which the company says offers lightness and flexibility, despite the thickness of the sole.

The Freestyle by Coolway Collection will ship to retailers starting January 1, 2017. ●

IT'S WHAT'S INSIDE...

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THE FOOTWEAR EYE



New women's styles from Samuel Hubbard.

BRANDING

Rockport's 'Made for Movers'



New campaign from Rockport.

The new global brand repositioning for the 45-year old Rockport brand, which broke in August, simultaneous with the first shipments of Rockport's Fall '16 products, will grow in scope throughout the fall and is expected to continue for a number of years. The new look and attitude, developed in conjunction with Brooklyn-based creative agency Madwell, comes a year after the investment arm of New Balance Athletic Shoe and private equity firm Berkshire Partners closed on its \$280 million acquisition of The Rockport Company and merged it with New Balance's Drydock Footwear Group to form The Rockport Group.

"We really emphasize the fact that we're made for movers from all walks of life, for all generations, for all wearing occasions," says Sue Dooley, SVP-global marketing.

"We're about celebrating the movement that people should enjoy in their daily lives," adding, "this [campaign] also ties into a heritage play for our brand. We're trying to tap back into basically what was an innovative 'hey day' for Rockport in terms of us being real, innovative craftspeople dedicated to the art of shoemaking."

Rockport will also drill down into its own and third-party data to reach specific consumer segments with its "Made for Movers" message. ●

NEW LINE

Hubbard's Female Touch

Samuel Hubbard founder Bruce Katz has launched a line of shoes that his daughter Julie will be able to wear one day. Katz, who launched the Samuel Hubbard line of footwear last year, said his initial inspiration came from a crayon drawing his daughter gave him one day. "She said 'I thought we could start a shoe company like you and dad used to have,'" Katz told *Footwear Insight* when showing off his new women's line. Katz said the drawing inspired his return to the shoe business after a hiatus of 27 years. Katz's grandfather Saul founded the original Hubbard shoe company in New Hampshire in 1930 and then his father eventually took over the business. Bruce and his father founded Rockport in 1970 with a line of leather moccasins they originally sold to retailers in plain white boxes. Hubbard's new women's line will ship in January. ●

CASUAL STYLE

The Driver's Feet



Top to bottom: Piloti's Pistone in rust; Superstrada in camel and Pistone in black.

The Italian brand Piloti, known for its high-end driving shoes, has begun selling a line of casual footwear in the United States. The company describes the collection as "a fusion of Italian design with our patented biomechanics and a motorsport-inspired style born at the track." The line includes loafers suited for wearing to the office as well as the mid-cut Mille, which features tumbled leather with tonal suede and shares the vintage racing tire-inspired tread pattern found on all Piloti driving shoes. Performance and Casual styles range from \$130 to \$240. Luxury styles range from \$350 to \$500. ●



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ENTREPRENEUR

Laying Down The Law

Kathryn Jackson graduated from law school and promptly decided she would rather be in the shoe business. Jackson is the founder of Protect Your Pumps, a company that makes a novel protective material for high-end dress shoes. She has been in business for five years and is expanding into new categories and looking at expanding retail distribution.

Jackson got the idea for the product while she was working as an associate at Neiman Marcus and watched her clients re-sole the Jimmy Choo and Christian Louboutin heels they purchased. “They were spending \$100 a pair to do that and I thought that there had to be a better solution,” she says.

Jackson created a clear plastic film “like what you would put on your iPhone,” and began trying to figure out a way to sell them. “I thought it would be a huge success and that I would be on Oprah talking about it,” she said.

Five years later, she hasn’t been on Oprah, but now sells her product mostly online and ships to more than 80 countries. Protect Your Pumps come three to a pack for about \$30. Each protector lasts five to 10 wears, according to Jackson. She plans to begin selling packs of 10-20 and is creating products that will protect flats and men’s shoes.

Last year, she was named Young Entrepreneur of the Year for the State of Wisconsin by the Small Business Administration and Google also began promoting her, as 40 percent of her business comes from searches on their site. ●



NEW LINE

Cados Comeback

Simco, the distributor of the Arcopedico line of shoes, has begun importing another line from Portugal — Cados is a line of handmade Portuguese sandals for women.

The Cados line of sandals feature leather uppers, leather lined footbeds, one-and-a-half-inch polyurethane wedge soles, open-toe design and rubber grip bottoms. Retail prices are around \$135 a pair. Cados was founded in Portugal in 2008 and entered the U.S. market through its distribution agreement with Simco late last year. ●



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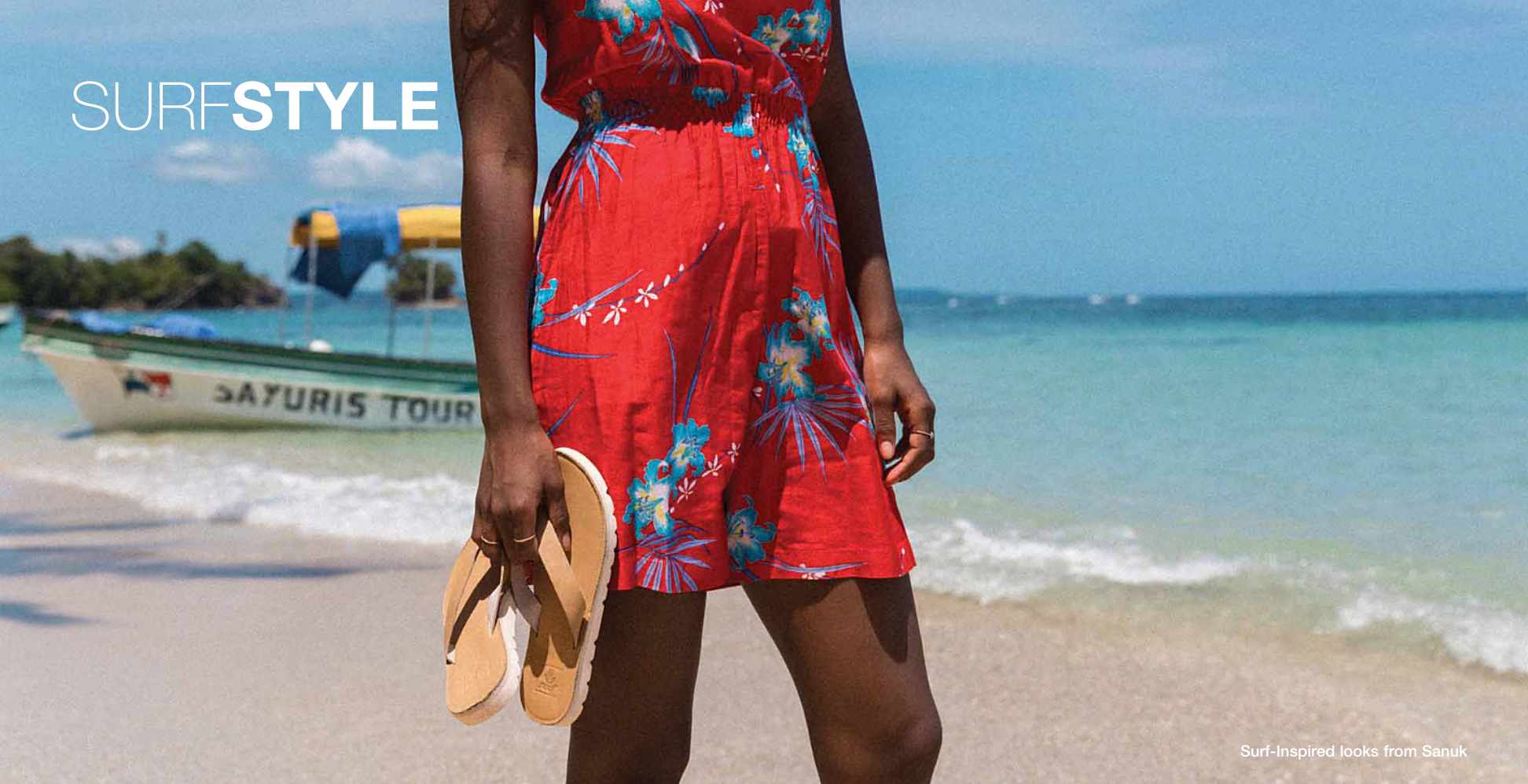
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Surf-Inspired looks from Sanuk

Endless Summer

With a Nod to Tradition, Surf Rides the Heritage Wave. By Suzanne Blecher

Back in 1966, brothers Paul and Jim Van Doren opened the Van Doren Rubber Company in Anaheim. The company was unique in that it manufactured shoes on premises and sold them directly to the public. By the early '70s, skateboarders were catching on to Vans' sticky soles, followed by BMX riders, surfers and snowboarders, along with others craving the idea of endless California sun. Even today, Vans remains synonymous with beach culture "and that is what separates us from many of the other brands we compete with," notes Chris Reed, Vans' global manager of surf.

It's natural that for Spring 2017 the brand is embracing the classic look and feel of Vans, yet with new textiles and technologies. Basic canvas, hemp, chambray textiles and washed-out canvases prevail, along with new Ultracush insoles for elevated comfort and wearability. To celebrate longboarder Joel Tudor's 20-year anniversary with Vans, the brand collaborated on a new collection. In women's surf, Vans introduces a collection of footwear that unites pro surfer Leila Hurst with her new wetsuit line. Styles include the Black Ball Hi, Authentic ESP and Rata Vulc.

While shoe/sandal hybrids and the hanging category have been prevalent for a few seasons, brands are still seeing value in adding new styles to round out their offerings.

To celebrate Hawaii, OluKai launches vibrant new colors of the Ho'opio, which pays homage to the water and flowers of the islands. The Kipi has also been updated featuring a luggy outsole with molded sipping and a wet grip rubber compound for wet and dry traction. In a long line of footwear created for the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association, these sandals are wear-tested with mixed use in mind. Meanwhile the Manoa lace-up with Drop-In Heel (for shoe and slide functionality) and removable footbed "is perfect for a wave check or run out to grab some surf tacos," says OluKai Head of Product, Blaine Conrad. For Spring '17 styles, "we explored both a modern and heritage interpretation of detail and style which made for a really fun mix," he adds. Jambu takes a similar tradition-driven approach by calling out "every day adventurers," who are folks who have been loyal to the brand since its founding six years ago, while also embracing urbanites enjoying their own backyards, according to marketing director Yetzalee Mazza.

"Inspiration lies within our own brand roots," notes Trisha Hegg, VP—global product for Sanuk. The Sidewalk Surfer shoe/sandal hybrid is both functional for the surf crowd and other consumers. The Vagabond and Donny are fresh takes on

classic silhouettes with new materials. The Donny is also the platform for the Yew-Knit, featuring a knitted, lightweight mesh upper. Designed to go in and out of the water, the Brumeister and Yoga Wander employ a new molded sandal footbed. Merrell goes from trail to water with the Duskair Moc featuring M Select Grip that provides traction on rugged and urban terrain. In addition, the Merrell Air Cushion in the heel absorbs shock and provides added stability.

Cool + Casual = Closed Toe

While shoe/sandal hybrids and the hanging category have been prevalent for a few seasons, brands are still seeing value in adding new styles to round out their offerings.

"Consumers are seeking versatility in their footwear and closed-toe shoes can be more adaptable on rugged terrain than a flip-flop," explains Kelly Santos, VP at Bogs Footwear. Santos further notes that "the shift is diversifying the market and creating more year-round footwear options for consumers." Bogs' Ethan and Uma are crafted with premium, unlined raw edge leather, while the Helix is a waterproof flip-flop style with the brand's new Trace Technology thermo-moldable footbed which instantly contours to the foot to eliminate break-in time. Reef also



OluKai Kipi



Jambu Mermaid



Merrell Duskaire



OluKai Ho'opio



Vans Joel Tudor Rata Vulc



Bogs Helix



Sanuk Brumeister



Jambu Sideline



Vans Leila Hurst Black Ball Hi



Sanuk Donny



Bogs Ethan Chukka



OluKai Manoa

played around with leather – working with tanneries to develop new waterproof leathers – to make what the brand’s product line manager Taylor Leopold, calls “the most versatile sandal yet.” The Voyage has a three-layer strap which eliminates seams, stitching and hot spots that can ruin feet. In addition, the new Beach Casual Collection “truly redefines the sandal/shoe hybrid” with an one-part cushion rubber outsole and one part thermoplastic rubber rand for a “lightweight, yet flexible tooling that directly mirrors the comforts of our sandal products, while also keeping the

outsole tooling very simple to look just like a basic cut-and-buff rubber sandal,” according to Colton Marquardt, product line manager at Reef.

While the Reef brand name has been around for years, it has really only been in the last five years that the brand “has put a cohesive vision behind our closed-toe category and put tons of energy and innovation into the business,” notes Marquardt. Success in the category ties back to direct extensions from the sandals business. Reef will continue to look to sandals to see how it can leverage the company’s South American surf roots. ●



bernie mev.

The Master of Woven Footwear





Back to the Future

By Jennifer Ernst Beaudry

Is this the start of a new era for K-Swiss?

The California-based heritage tennis brand says turnaround efforts – a work in progress since the 2013 acquisition of the embattled brand by Korean firm E.Land World Limited – are starting to pay off, with sales for the fourth quarter trending positive.

Barney Waters, the former head of marketing for K-Swiss' Global Brands division (including Palladium and Supra), took over as president in January and has been pushing even harder to refocus the brand on its classic tennis heritage and capitalize on market trends.

In addition to a shakeup on the sales side (Waters estimated that the brand had changed 75 percent of its sales agents while adding new territories), the brand named Puma veteran Sean O'Shea as creative director in June, and announced that the brand would be moving its global headquarters from its



K-Swiss
President
**Barney
Waters**

longtime home in Westlake Village, CA, to downtown Los Angeles at the end of the year.

The internal moves, Waters says, should start bearing fruit at the right time.

"We peeled back the layers of K-Swiss to the original brand heritage as an American tennis brand: this is what's K-Swiss really is and was, and it's one of the hottest categories right now," he says. "We're in an opportunistic time because retro classic is really hot as a category, white sneakers are really hot as a category and that's right in our wheelhouse."

But it's not necessarily Champagne time yet.

The brand's footprint is still a small one, nowhere near the range it commanded in its heyday, and other labels with equally strong heritage plays (Adidas and Vans have both profited handsomely, for example) are stiff competition.

NPD analyst Matt Powell says that while trends are working in the brand's favor, the market hasn't responded.

"You'd think they would be leveraging this and so far, they have not," he says. But Waters says the best is yet to come.

"It's like we're seeing the first green shoots and we plan to continue to grow in Q1," he says. "We're not where we want to be in terms of the business — we have a long way to go. But we have double-digit growth planned globally for the year, and we feel confident of achieving that."

Here, Waters sounds off on sneaker shops, keeping ahead of the trends and channeling startup culture.

Where is K-Swiss today?

"We're slightly ahead of plan in all the critical areas — revenue, margin, expense reduction. And Q4 was the first real season we've sold in since I took over in January."

What will it take for you to achieve the growth you're looking for?

"First and foremost, we need to maintain good relationships with the accounts that have been our biggest,



Sneakers from the Fall '16 Modern Court collection are meant to give a fresh spin to the brand's heritage style.

historically: Famous Footwear, Shoe Carnival, places like that. We're starting to see our business in that channel turn back around — the fact that the market is coming our way in terms of trend helps. We're also with Finish Line in Macy's in the department store channel, and they're a strong partner, and in accounts like Foot Action, Shoe Palace, City Gear, all the way up to places like Bloomingdales and Nordstrom, as well as Amazon and Zappos."

What steps have you taken to build those relationships?

"The other thing we've done, from a pricing perspective, is sharpen up. We've got products in the \$55 to \$65 range, just under some of our bigger competitors, and it's one of our most successful pricepoints. It's an area of growth — we've done market analytics, and we're finding the gaps where we can fill a hole for our retailers."

Where do sneaker shops fit in your plan?

"We're not necessarily following the old sneaker boutique strategy of doing 12 pairs and then waiting three years for it to filter down. I don't think that's a game we're going to play."

While retro is undeniably hot, fashion trends can be fickle. How long do you see the trend lasting?

"I think the one thing I've learned over the years is that trends and cycles are like a pendulum swing. It's a reaction. If one day everyone's wearing high-priced technical footwear, the natural evolution is to low-tech, simplified styles. As the retro trends starts to expand and broaden to the Main Street, the antidote to that is modernization — which is why a lot of what you're seeing us do is modernization of core styles. We'll get faster and more modern toward the end of year and a lot more forward-thinking and new by next year. We're a brand with a lot of awareness and equity and nostalgia, but we've got to deliver new product fast and that's the '17 play."

Taking sure-fire classics into new looks is a gamble — what will be the critical elements in successfully bringing the brand into new styles?

"A big piece of why we feel so confident has been the addition of Sean O' Shea as our

creative director. At the end of the day, real growth has to come from new product and he has a track record of commercial winners and really forward-thinking design. What I'm focusing Sean on is our future vision of 'modern court.' Everyone is very familiar with the design DNA of heritage, so let's modernize that. No one owns that. That's where we see the growth potential."

K-Swiss went through a protracted period of sales losses and market share erosion before its acquisition by E.Land. You've made some big changes to the brand's focus and the sales have started to turn around — what does all that mean in terms of company culture?

"I would say the brand today feels very entrepreneurial and like a startup — which is as far apart as it used to feel as possible, to be honest. And we've done that on purpose. We describe ourselves as a 50-year-old startup. We're running this lean. You need to have people who are willing to roll up their sleeves and do what it takes, who can really listen to customer needs and react."

The brand is moving from Westlake Village to downtown LA. What made you want to change your location?

"Downtown LA is going through a massive, cultural revival. We want to be close to the pulse of our consumer and at one of the worldwide epicenters of fashion. It makes us more accessible and gives us access to the consumer. It'll be faster to recognize needs that can lead to new product solutions."

Who is the customer for the new K-Swiss?

"We think the young entrepreneur is the person we're speaking to and designing to. We aspire to outfit the next generation of entrepreneurs."

Why entrepreneurs?

"It's the modern aspiration of young people. They don't want to be athletes or celebrities; they want to be CEOs. One of our taglines is 'sneakers for CEOs' — we're changing the concept of what a CEO looks like. It could be a 19-year-old in LA who opens a juice bar. These are the new aspirational people. The only people who want to play for the Yankees these days are 12-year-olds." ●

Supra Looks Ahead

With 10 years under its belt, K-Swiss label mate Supra is relying on its roots in skate to grow its lifestyle business.

"We are born from skate, have a great heritage and a position of authenticity there, but we knew our major growth potential was going to come from lifestyle and fashion consumer," says Bob "Cape" Capener, who has served as president of Supra and sister brand Krew since June 2015.

"In the industry as a whole, core endemic skate is very difficult. Fortunately that represents about 10 percent of our business overall for volume. Ninety percent is more lifestyle and fashion — for people who are not necessarily jumping on a board every day. But by having an authentic position, that drives the rest of that 90 percent," he says.

To celebrate its anniversary, the brand is releasing limited-edition versions of the four editions of the iconic Skytop model and has launched a pop-up creative space and shop in downtown Los Angeles in August. For 2017, the brand is expanding its women's offering and kids' program, as well as a full cut-and-sew apparel collection.

But Capener says that skate innovation, including an enhanced version of the brand's proprietary Suprafoam, will be critical as it looks to expand.

"Skate has a very high bullshit detector — if you do anything fake, you'll be called out immediately," he says. "We're addressing real needs and nothing is made up or fabricated."

And with skateboarding slated to be part of the Olympics in Japan in 2020, Capener says there's lots of potential, both in the core U.S. market and in E.Land strongholds in Asia-Pacific as well.

"Our corporate partner E.Land is a very dynamic company that has been very strong capital resources and a very, very strong footprint in Asia-Pacific," he says. "We know our future growth will be built off of the retail footprint of stores and kiosks they own in Asia. We can leverage that to help build the relevancy of California skate culture and transport it there."

THE GOLD MEDAL SERVICE AWARDS 2016

Footwear Insight's exclusive ratings of the best sit-and-fit retailers in America.

GOLDWINNERS

Lucky Shoes	Fairlawn, OH	100	Lucky Feet Shoes	Rancho Cucamonga, CA	89
Turnpike Comfort Footwear	Flushing, NY	100	Miroballi Shoes	Orland Park, IL	89
Walking Comfort	Centerville, UT	100	When the Shoe Fits	Vancouver, WA	89
Modern Shoe	Provo, UT	98	Desert Birkenstock	Las Vegas, NV	88
Beck's Shoes	San Jose, CA	95	Phillips Shoes	Charleston, SC	88
Brown's Shoe Fit	Visalia, CA	95	The Foot Spot	Overland Park, KS	87
Tops for Shoes	Asheville, NC	95	Work Boot Warehouse	San Bernadino, CA	87
Orva Shoes	New York, NY	94	Burch's Shoes	Eugene, OR	86
Sole Perfection	Everett, WA	93	Country Cobbler	Valdosta, GA	86
Easton Shoes	Columbus, OH	92	Murray's Shoes	Littleton, CO	86
J Michael Shoes	Syracuse, NY	92	Comfort Plus Shoes & Footcare	Leawood, KS	85
Januzzi's Footwear	Amherst, OH	92	Soft Shoe	Richmond, KY	85
Woldruff's Footwear	Goshen, IN	92	Feet First Tampa	Tampa, FL	84
Chandler's Walk Shoppe	Salt Lake City, UT	91	Guarantee Shoe Center	Bakersfield, CA	84
Coollest Shoes in California	Carlsbad, CA	89	J Pruitt Shoes	Little Rock, AR	84
Happy Feet Plus	Largo, FL	89	Comfort One Shoes	Washington, DC	83

What constitutes good service? And what stores are delivering it?

Those were the questions we sought to answer as we researched our second annual Gold Medal Service Awards. To help get answers, we enlisted several of the top retailers in the country to develop a mystery shopping report that would evaluate the consumer experience in top independent shoe stores across the country. Then we contracted with Franklin Retail Solutions, the leading provider of in-store merchandising, marketing and information solutions for the active lifestyle retail category. The process began with nominations from *Footwear Insight's* audience. We received nominations and subsequently evaluated more than 120 stores. The stores were rated on 20 data points. The criteria and scoring system appears on page 28. The mystery shopping evaluations took place in May and June of this year and included the purchase of a pair of shoes. Our goal is to be fully transparent in this process. Any store that would like to know if they were nominated can contact us. For any store that was shopped, we will share the results of their mystery shopping evaluation. Of the more than 120 stores that were evaluated, 62 scored 70 points or above and earned Gold Medal Service designation. All winning stores received a plaque and window stickers commemorating their honor. These stores also received a press release so they can promote the recognition on social media and in their respective hometowns.



**GOLD MEDAL
SERVICE
AWARD 2016
FOR OUTSTANDING
CUSTOMER SERVICE**

Shoe City	Windsor Mill, MD	83	Shoe Mill	Portland, OR	75
Snyderman's Shoes of Naples	Naples, FL	83	Alan's Shoe House	Tucson, AZ	74
Schuler Shoes	Saint Louis Park, MN	81	Best-Made Shoes	Pittsburgh, PA	74
Shoe Market	Lynnfield, MA	80	The Foot Traveler	Buford, GA	74
The Tannery	Boston, MA	80	Vernon Powell Shoes	Salisbury, MD	74
Buck's Shoes	Fremont, NE	79	Walkabout Footwear	Walnut Creek, CA	74
V&A Bootery	Kalamazoo, MI	79	K&D Shoes	Conyers, GA	73
Benjamin Lovell Shoes	Philadelphia, PA	78	Dodds Shoe Co.	Laramie, WY	72
Foot Solutions	Matthews, NC	78	Evans on the Common	Townsend, MA	72
Stan's Fit for Your Feet	Glendale, WI	78	Schnee's Boot & Shoes	Bozeman, MT	72
Birkenstock General	San Antonio, TX	77	Valley Sole	Huntsville, AL	72
Schuler Shoes	Maple Grove, MN	77	On Your Mark	Los Altos, CA	71
Yorker Shoes	Johnston, RI	77	Reyers Shoe Store	Sharon, PA	71
Johnson's Shoes	Medford, OR	76	Hyman's Pennyworths	Newburyport, MA	70
Morgan's Shoes	Madison, WI	76			
Mosser's Shoes	Champaign, IL	75			

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The three stores that nailed our evaluations with perfect scores tell how they do it



Members of the Walking Comfort team: Bryce Anderson, Tiffany Anderson, Brytin Jones and Michelle Gardiner.

Walking Comfort, Centerville, UT Q&A with Bryce Anderson

The Culture

“Our culture of service begins with our people. We have been very fortunate to find outstanding staff members that strive to serve others. We train, incentivize and reward our staff to provide exceptional service, but ultimately it comes down to having great people. We have great people and we have had great people from our inception.”

Training

“We have certain training and requirements new employees must pass off during their new employee training period. All employees are expected to take online and in-store training for all of our brands and procedures. Senior associates and managers are assigned to work with new hires. And, we also rely on our brand reps to provide active training with our staff as they work side by side in the stores.”

The Team

“We have a total of 25 employees spread between our two stores and our online businesses. Our average associate stays for multiple years, we have people who started with us when we first opened. Once we find great people we do what we can to keep them. Generally, the only people that leave are leaving due to schooling or other major life events. We treat our people well, we try and offer opportunities from them to progress, and we hold them to a high standard. All of this results in happy people who enjoy their work.

“Our sales staff is paid via a combination of hourly, team commission and individual bonuses based on goals. We have found that the team commission helps grow a team that works together for the good of the customer, while the individual bonuses really help provide incentives for associates on areas where they may need improvement or where we want to focus as a store.”

Competing to Win

“Our associates are very cognizant of the Internet — the competition it poses as well as the opportunities it brings. We reduce the negative impact of the Internet on our stores by selecting good brands that have clean distribution, by providing exceptional service, by offering to price

match any and all competition, and by having an outstanding selection of products, colors, sizes so that our customers don’t have to go elsewhere.

“Our biggest competition comes from our vendors — from them selling on their own websites, selling direct to Amazon and selling to channels and accounts that devalue their brands and products. We have many brands that do an outstanding job of not being our competitors and are truly great partners. On the other hand, we have some vendors that are making poor decisions that are negatively impacting brick-and-mortar stores, independents and even their own brands. These are the brands that we are removing from our stores. We want and need great brands that we can grow, and grow with.”

Tales from the Floor

“I could go on and on with examples of how awesome our people are. There have been many times when our staff has gone in before or after hours to take care of customers or have driven shoes to homes or customers at work.

“One story that comes to mind is when Linda (who is now our general manager), one of our sales associates, had a gentleman come into the store that badly needed new shoes. As Linda worked with the gentleman she realized that he was in a bad situation financially. When she finished working with the gentleman I noticed that she added the pair of shoes the gentleman selected to her employee account. She paid for and gave the shoes to the gentleman. I asked her why and she said she felt like he needed the help and that she wanted to be of service to him.”●

“Once we find great people we do what we can to keep them. Generally, the only people that leave are leaving due to schooling or other major life events.”



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THIS
IS WHAT
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The three stores that nailed our evaluations with perfect scores tell how they do it

GOLD MEDAL SERVICE AWARD 2016 FOR OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE



Turnpike Comfort Footwear's Darryl Caraballo waited on the mystery shopper and scored a perfect 100.

“Everyone is our competitor. Local retailers, vendors, Amazon and so on. Our biggest opportunity to compete is with customer service and because of this it’s our biggest challenge.”

Turnpike Comfort Footwear, Queens, NY Q&A with Steven Rueda

The Culture

“It starts at the top, with myself, my brother and my store manager. I’ve always been under the impression that if you provide the consumer with courteous, professional and ethical service, you’d be successful. That’s even more pertinent today, because I think consumers are thirsting for human interaction. A greeting at the door, an offering of a drink, a handshake, a personal heartfelt thank you for your business. These are the things we stress on a daily basis and that are supported by constant managerial supervision. We always have a manager and/or an owner on the floor.”

Training

“We have weekly meetings. We always start with customer service and discuss the following: What did we do right, what did we do wrong and what can we do better? Then we move on to product. What’s new, what are the features and benefits and how they apply to our customers? Where the shoes are made, how they are made and the company’s history. You can be the nicest person in the world, but if you don’t know what you are selling and why, then you aren’t providing the optimal service. We want our associates to have an emotional connection to the product, to be excited about the product and transmit that emotion and excitement to the customer. This is everyone, not only the sales associates, but also our Point-of-Sale person, our IT person, even the bookkeeper. Everyone gets involved.”

The Team

“My manager has been with me for 20 years, since he was 16. We do extremely well hiring college students. They are sponges, bright

and eager to learn. They have no preconceived ideas about our business or processes, so we get to mold them into our perfect sales associate, doing it our way. We can get three to five years from college students. Sometimes, if they end up loving the job and the people they work with, we even get some to make it a career.”

The Competition

“Our staff is very cognizant of competition from the Internet. They are inside of our management circle, not outside looking in, so they know the challenges we are facing. They are aware of vertical selling, Amazon, showrooming and Internet pricing issues. They know who our real partners are and where we make our money. It’s like everyone is an owner.

“Everyone is our competitor. Local retailers, vendors, Amazon and so on. Our biggest opportunity to compete is with customer service and because of this it’s our biggest challenge. Fortunately, our staff is humming, they love what they do and love coming to work. I attribute that to my store manager. He really makes our store a fun place to work. Of course, he missed his calling, he should have been a comedian.”

Tales from the Floor

“We had a gentleman that found us on Yelp and came in because of our reviews. He had a specific work shoe need that we couldn’t fulfill properly and we called a friend with a store 50 miles east of us that was able to fill his needs. He was so appreciative that he wrote us a great review on Yelp about his interaction with our store. Sure enough, months later, he was traveling to Europe and came in to buy several pairs for his trip.”

GOLD MEDAL FAQs

What stores are eligible for The Gold Medal Awards?

All independently owned shoe stores and regional chains that have significant shoe businesses. National chains are not eligible. Running stores and sports specialty stores are not eligible.

How did you decide what stores to shop?

Nominations were submitted by stores themselves,

brands and sales representatives. More than 120 nominations were evaluated and more than 100 stores were shopped and rated.

How can I find out if my store was shopped?

Send an e-mail to Mark Sullivan at msullivan@formula4media.com to find out if your store was shopped. He will share a summary of your mystery shopping at no charge. Full mystery shopping results

are available for an administrative fee of \$150.

What if my store wasn’t shopped? How can I be included next year?

Please send an e-mail to **Christina Henderson** at chenderson@formula4media.com and provide us with your physical address, a brief history of your store and a list of the brands you carry. We’ll do our best to include you in 2017.



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The three stores that nailed our evaluations with perfect scores tell how they do it

GOLD MEDAL SERVICE AWARD 2016 FOR OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE



Tim Cassidy provided the service that helped earn Lucky Shoes its perfect score.

Lucky Shoes, Ohio Q&A with John Luck

The Culture

“We create a service culture by maintaining a diligent focus on store standards and selling standards that become a habit of quality customer service along with genuinely having a good time with our customers. The selling standards are the science of what we do but connecting with the customer is the art of the relationship.”

Training

“We educate our sales staff on the art of shoe fitting and service. We require in-depth training to explore and understand our customers’ needs to exceed their expectations.”

The Team

“We have a solid core of long-term team members that have been with us for as long as 40 years, plus we onboard new team members on a regular basis.”

The Competition

“The prevalence of the internet is a challenge in all of our stores. We utilize our competitive advantage over the Internet by maximizing our personal trade and taking

control of each and every sale. Multi-brand and vendor websites are our biggest competition.”

Tales from the Floor

“We had a woman in our store with a new brace and our Superstar Tim Cassidy was ready and willing to help her find the perfect shoe. After a few different options, she was happiest with the New Balance 928, and with the Ikebukuro from Finn Comfort. She walked out of Lucky’s Fairlawn as happy as can be with every pair of Ikebukuro’s in her size we had in stock. (That’s four pair, folks!) along with the men’s brown 928s, a pair of Powerstep insoles, five New Balance sneaker balls (to make sure her new shoes never end up smelly) and a bottle of Rain and Stain to protect her investment. Tim also ordered her four more pair of Ikebukuros for her to take back to Florida with her when she heads back south in a few months. The total sale was \$1661.70 (before tax, of course) with a 10-item sale. The customer sang praises of how patient and helpful Tim was with her, and she was overjoyed to find comfortable, good looking shoes that fit her new brace.”

The Criteria: How Stores Were Rated and Scored

- 1. How promptly were you greeted?**
30 seconds or less rated a score of 4. One minute was a 3. 90 seconds a two and two minutes a 1. Longer than two minutes was rated a 0.
- 2. Were you greeted with a smile when you entered the store?**
Yes earned you 5 points. No was rated a zero. No partial points on this for friendly nods or smirks.
- 3. Did the sales associate measure your foot?**
Zero for no. 5 points for yes.
- 4. Did the sales associate ask you what type of shoe or the purpose of your footwear purchase was?**
5 points for yes.
- 5. Were you provided a comfortable place to sit while trying on shoes?**
Pretty basic stuff. 3 points for yes. Zero for no.
- 6. Were you offered anything to elevate the in-store experience, such as a drink?**
Five points for a yes.

- 7. Do you feel you were offered a fair selection?**
Our mystery shopper rated stores on a one-to-four-point scale on this question.
- 8. Did the sales associate help you try on your shoe?**
Zero for No. 4 points for yes.
- 9. Were clean try-on socks available?**
Zero for No. 2 points for yes.
- 10. Did the associate recommend a specific shoe or shoes?**
No equals a zero. A range of shoes earned 3 points and one specific shoe equals 2 points.
- 11. On a scale of 0 to 5 (0=rude and 5=enthusiastic) please rate the professionalism of the sales person who helped you.**
- 12. Did the associate discuss insoles, socks, slippers, handbags or other products with you?**
Zero for no. 5 points for yes.
- 13. On a scale of 0 to 5, how**

- knowledgeable and helpful was the staff overall?**
Zero for not helpful. 5 points very helpful and knowledgeable.
- 14. How would you rate the sales associates on their attire? Was it appropriate? Was the staff easily identifiable?**
This was rated 1 through 3 points.
- 15. Were you thanked and asked to return?**
Zero for not being thanked at all. 1 point for a Thank You. 3 points for a thank you and an invitation to return.
- 16. Was the store well-lit and easy to maneuver? Mystery shoppers rated this on a scale of 1 to 3.**
- 17. Was the merchandise presented in a way that was easy to understand and shop?**
Mystery shoppers rated this on a scale of 1 to 4.
- 18. How inviting and comfortable was the store? Mystery shoppers rated this on a**

- scale of 1 to 4.**
- 19. Were you asked for your physical or e-mail address?**
Zero for no. 5 points for yes.
- 20. Rate the assortment of accessory products (socks, insoles, handbags, etc.).**
Not Good was 0 points. Average was one point. Above average was 2; very good was worth 3 points.
- 21. Was the checkout process easy and intuitive? Mystery shoppers rated this on a scale of 1 to 3.**
- 22. Rate the quality of the bag the merchandise was placed in? Good earned you 2 points.**
- 23. How would you rate the overall experience? Five points was very good. Zero points was poor.**
- 24. Would you refer a friend to this store? The ultimate question. 10 points was the highest.**
- Suggestions or ideas? Send them to Mark Sullivan: msullivan@formula4media.com**

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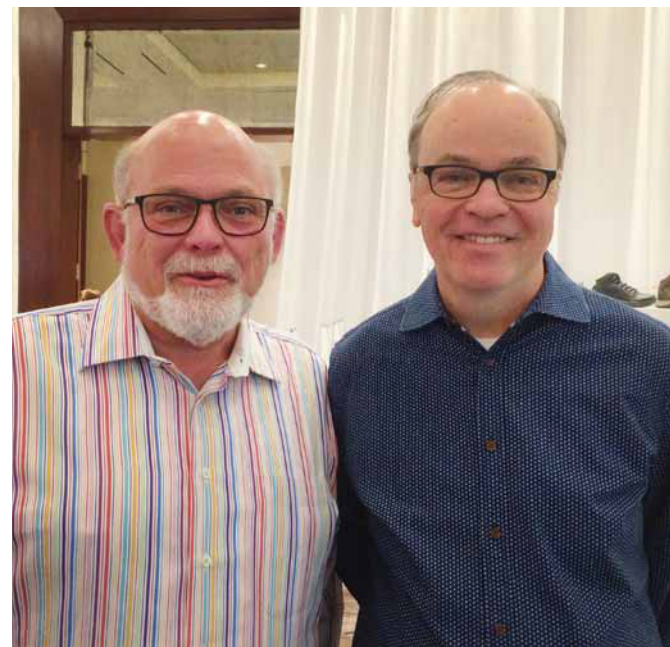
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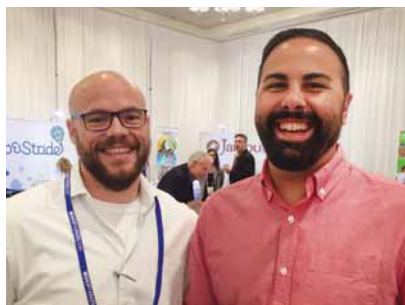


TROPHY RETAILERS

Everyone loves a good party — even at 7:30 in the morning. More than 30 of the 2016 Gold Medal Service Award Winners gathered in Las Vegas during trade show season to receive their honors in person at a festive breakfast hosted by sponsors Alegria, Waldlaufer, Vida Kids and Vionic.



Left to right: The team from Schnee's; Maurice Breton, Comfort One and Mark Sullivan, *Footwear Insight*.



Left to right: Lenny and Marcia Comeras, Easton Shoes; Garrett Breton, Comfort One and Josh Habre, Shoe Mill; the Schulers team; Mollie and Kirk Brown, Buck's Shoes.



Left to right: Ed Habre, Shoe Mill; John and Tom Luck from Lucky Shoes; Holden Nagelberg, Waldlaufer, Steven Rueda, Turnpike Shoes and Rob Seehusen, Vionic.

SIT. FIT. AND BE RECOGNIZED.

Seeking out and recognizing the independent shoe stores for 2017 that offer the best customer service in America.

Who is eligible?

All independently owned shoe stores and regional chains that have a significant shoe business. National chains are not eligible.

How can my store get nominated?

Any industry member can nominate a store. Nominations are now being accepted.

What happens after a store is nominated?

Nominations are evaluated and stores are then mystery shopped using a 15-step evaluation process developed with top independent shoe store owners based on their own training policies and programs. Mystery shopping will begin Spring 2017.

How will stores be rated?

Franklin Resource Group, one of the top retail merchandising companies in the U.S. will "mystery shop" these stores, and rate them on everything from the greeting to the fitting process, to checkout.

How can I prepare my store to be mystery shopped and rated?

Footwear Insight encourages stores to review the criteria and share with their sales associates. Copies of the criteria can be obtained at our website.

What happens if my store is selected as one of the 50 Gold Medal Service Winners?

You will be notified by e-mail before the results are published in *Footwear Insight*. All stores that are selected will be recognized in the magazine and at an upcoming awards ceremony. You will also receive a customized press release that can be distributed to media in local markets and window decals that will allow you to promote the recognition all year long and in your advertising.

footwearinsight.com/goldmedal2017



Nominations should be sent to Christina Henderson at chenderson@formula4media.com

Stores with questions about The Gold Medal Awards should contact Mark Sullivan at msullivan@formula4media.com

For sponsorship information, contact: Jeff Nott, Publisher, at jnott@formula4media.com 516-305-4711 or your Account Representative

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A CASE FOR THE CLOSET



1. TRETORN Beta3 **2. ECCO** Venture. **3. COUGAR** Freddy in Blueberry.
4. VIONIC Calypso Sandal combines jute-wrapped heel with elegant ties at ankle.

When talking about accessories for Spring 2017, there are three products that retailers need to focus on — wallets, purses and shoes. Let’s explain. If retailers want to get consumers to open their wallets and purses and buy new shoes, they need to present them with something they don’t already have in their closets. And designers are trying their best to send shoppers from the retail floor to the cash register to their closets. Brands are swinging

out with new colors, materials and constructions. Basics are basic no more. We’re sure there are some regular sandals out there, but you won’t find any on the following pages. “Comfort” sandals feature jewels and adornments and no detail is used thoughtlessly. Buckles and straps are miniature works of art. And the color palette is so bright and imaginative it seems a shame to put these in any closet.



1. ROCKPORT Perf Lace Up for Women. **2. NAOT** Arataki closed toe sling back shoe with cutout designs. **3. ABEO** Unify in Grey Metallic Nubuck with cutout detailing. **4. BERNIE MEV** Balmly in light gold plasma. **5. BERNIE MEV** Endless Sandal. **6. DANSKO** Demetra Open Toe. **7. NAOT** Lantana with a hook and loop strap. **8. MINNETONKA** York Wedge in Blue Denim. **9. DANSKO** Viera in Red. **10. MINNETONKA** Portofino in black.

A
CASE
FOR THE
CLOSET



1. VIONIC Carmel with a three-inch block heel. **2. VIONIC** Tansy with suede uppers. **3. WALKING CRADLE** Theta in turquoise. **4. MINNETONKA** Boca sandal. **5. BIRKENSTOCK** Ellen Graceful in Pearl White is made in Portugal. **6. AETREX** Lydia. **7. HISPANITAS** Greer-premium leather triple strap sandal on a block heel and platform. **8. KHOMBU** Kenai. **9. AETREX** Brenda. **10. ABEO** Sallie with ankle tie trend and Velcro front. **11. BERNIE MEV** Webster in hot pink and gray.


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A
CASE
FOR THE
CLOSET



1. WALDLAUFER Riley double gore slip-on in the desert texture material and thick sporty bottom. **2. SAS** Simplify in mustard with moccasin construction wraps soft leather completely around the foot. **3. COUGAR** Flip in wheat. **4. SAS** Delaney in Italian leather with inside gore panels. **5. ROCKPORT** Style purpose Wingtip. **6. WALDLAUFER** Romy ghillie lace-up on an athletic bottom that can also accommodate an orthotic. **7. TRETORN** Bold in Blue. **8. ROCKPORT** Wyat Captoe. **9. COUGAR** Kensington in Folk Print **10. TRETORN** Tournet.

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Music to their Feet Durango's Country Music Connection



It's very much in vogue for rappers and hip-hop stars to sell sneakers these days, but Durango has been using musicians to help promote its boot line for most of the past decade.

"We love being aligned with country music," says Byron Wortham, SVP and GM of Durango. "It matches up great with our 18-34-year-old target consumer and really allows us to connect with them on an emotional level."

Durango's relationship with country music began in 2005 shortly after Rocky Brands bought the company. The brand's country music strategy includes a relationship with Carter Winter, a rising star from rural Ohio, and sponsorships of the Country Music Awards festival and the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville. Durango also recently wrapped up a three-year promotion, The "Sole Performer" Competition, which identified an up-and-coming singer songwriter and awarded him with a \$10,000 cash prize to help jump start his career.



Carter Winter



Jamie Kent

This year's winner was Jamie Kent, a Nashville artist who will release a new album "All American Mutt" on October 16. As part of his prize, Kent was featured in Durango's advertising and featured in a public relations campaign that saw him appear on the nationally televised Fox & Friends and featured in an article in the daily Nashville newspaper, *The Tennessean*, about how brand partnerships can help launch a career. Kent also received a wardrobe of Durango boots, apparel from Wrangler and a guitar from Taylor, one of the top American manufacturers of acoustic guitars.

Wortham says the relationship with Kent typifies how Durango likes to work with individual artists.

"For a relationship to work, the artist really needs to be engaged with the company and Jamie is," Wortham says. "He knows our sales reps and designers and has played at a number of our corporate events."

Wortham says it's difficult to quantify a return-on-investment with some of the spending on music, but Durango is able to quantify what's resonating with consumers by gauging response to social media.

"Marketing initiatives can be difficult to put a number on. However, with social campaigns we can capture engagement and sales penetration in relation to specific promotions. We are able to leverage the partnerships and activations with artist to build stronger partnerships and promotions with our dealers."

Both Winter and Kent perform at Rocky Brands corporate events and the company uses its sponsors' access to the Grand Ole Opry to entertain retailers when they are in town.

Durango has introduced a collection that has a direct connection to country music. The new Music City Style Collection, which will feature casual styles for men and women, begins shipping to stores in December. ●

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BRINGING IT HOME

Making footwear in the U.S. is more than just a feel-good trend. For many brands it is serious business. The “Made in America” footwear on this page represents a wide variety of styles from comfort and casual to trendsetting and athletic. Brands such as Cole Haan, New Balance and Wolverine, which make most of their footwear outside of the U.S., have committed to making some product in the U.S. and have created elite collections within their offerings to highlight this Made in America product. Specializing in fit, Munro & Company is noteworthy in that the brand makes its shoes in Arkansas (the company sources uppers and finished shoes from global partners). And upstart flip-flop brand Tidal makes its sandals in New Rochelle, NY, with all components sourced in the U.S.



1. COLE HAAN The Made in Maine collection of handcrafted footwear features premium leathers in the Long Wing, Cap Toe and Split Toe styles, and Horween leather in the Pinch penny loafer (pictured). **2. NEW BALANCE** NB's MiUSA Photographic Journey Collection includes three U.S.-made styles: M998CRA, MSRP \$179.95; M990CIT2, MSRP \$209.95; and M997CEF, MSRP \$209.95. **3. MUNRO** The American-made Tallie is a fully lined kid-suede smoking slipper with laser-etched quilted detail on the upper. MSRP \$200. **4. TIDAL** Assembled in New York from U.S.-sourced materials: Bolts, MSRP \$26; and Shooting Stars, MSRP \$26. **5. WOLVERINE 1000 MILE** Made in the USA with Horween Chromexcel leather, the Dylan Boot will be available in Spring 2017. MSRP \$400.

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