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The Power 30

*Who made the
cut this year?*



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The Power 30

These are this year's most influential fashion leaders.



1 Rod Levis CUE CLOTHING CO-FOUNDER

A commitment to local manufacturing allows his business to place new designs into stores within three to five weeks. And after 50 years of supporting Australian makers, founder Rod Levis was formally recognised in this year's Queen's Birthday Honours List. Levis was awarded an AM, a Member of the Order of Australia, for his significant service to the fashion retail and manufacturing industry, as well as the community. It all started in 1968, when Levis and his team introduced trend-driven and fashion forward designs to Sydney. Still Australian owned by Levis and his family, Cue is the largest local manufacturer of fashion in Australia and is accredited with Ethical Clothing Australia. "This honour has come as a complete surprise naturally," he says. "I am not sure why my nomination was successful – but I am both honoured and proud. The award strengthens my resolve to retain as much of our production locally as feasible."



2 Richard Facioni ALCEON RETAIL GROUP EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Alceon Retail Group executive director Richard Facioni has a number of brands in the investment portfolio: but it's retail, particularly fashion retail, that has captured the industry's attention. The investment firm has fast become one of the biggest apparel groups in the country, with Noni B, Specialty Fashion Group, Pretty Girl Fashion Group, Ezibuy and Pumpkin Patch all acquisitions. This year, Facioni cast the net further afield with a majority buyout of designer womenswear label Ginger & Smart. "This is a strategic move to continue to diversify our portfolio and invest in highly desirable retail brands," he says. "We plan to grow the business, both online and through physical stores. [Founders] Alexandra and Genevieve bring notable management and design calibre and we look forward to working together."

3 Ian Bailey KMART GROUP MD

In June, Wesfarmers announced it would acquire Australian eCommerce group Catch for \$230 million. While the business will continue to operate as an independent unit, it will be overseen by Kmart Group MD Ian Bailey. Combined with his stewardship of discount department stores Myer and David Jones, this makes him a serious operator in the value space. In fact, Bailey says he aims

to leverage Catch's infrastructure across the entire network of brands. "We are excited to work with the Catch team and look forward to leveraging our capabilities to grow the business and accelerate the customer-driven, omnichannel initiatives across Kmart and Target," Bailey says. "This will further drive best practice in supply chain, fulfilment and online execution across our brands, including opportunities for Target to secure online fulfilment capacity and productivity benefits. Catch will also benefit from the support of Kmart Group's scale and capabilities to drive its continued growth."

4 Rebecca Hard SUSSAN GM

How can a heritage womenswear brand like Sussan, which attracts 75% of overall sales from 560,000 members, move into the future without alienating its existing customer base? For Rebecca Hard, the answer is a creative revitalisation backed by a digital-first marketing strategy. The brand unleashed a directional winter strategy in February, underpinned by its 'Only For Women' campaign. The creative featured high-end editorial looks, communicated digitally and via an in-store campaign.



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"February was a pretty quiet time in the market so it enabled us to spend a lot of money at that time and get a very, very good reach," Hard says.

The campaign reached 2.58 million unique women across Instagram and Facebook. It was delivered to one in three women active on social media and one in five women in Australia. Through that, Only For Women had 3.7 million interactions and a reach of 781,000 unique women between 18 and 24. According to Hard, the result was a 23% increase in revenue on the site and most importantly a foot into the younger women's market. "It is important to innovate and try new ideas to test the waters," she says.

5 Michael Gazal GAZAL CORPORATION EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This year, PVH Corp made a long-awaited strike on Australia's Gazal Corporation. Executive director Michael Gazal, who owns almost 40% of the company, was the biggest winner in the meteoric deal with the US giant. Most of Gazal's revenue is extracted through its joint venture with PVH, PVH Brands Australia – on-selling its Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein, Van Heusen, Pierre Cardin, Trent Nathan and Fred Bracks brands in Australia. The aggregate net purchase price for the deal, which included approximately 78% of Gazal shares, was A\$124 million. PVH already owned 22% of Gazal's shares with PVH Corp CEO Emanuel Chirico praising local management. "PVH currently – and for many years – has had a successful business relationship with our Australian partners. Gazal has enhanced the market position of our brands in Australia and New Zealand and we believe the region continues to offer significant growth over the next five years."

6 Sacha Laing GENERAL PANTS CEO

As the industry pushes towards a more sustainable future, one streetwear chain is promoting the ultimate solution: a circular economy with customer rewards. General Pants CEO Sacha Laing commenced a trial this year with full-circle fashion waste solution firm BlockTexx. The Sydney-based business uses a process called separation of fabric technology (SOFT) to break down polycotton textiles into raw materials to be repurposed in various industries. Laing says

the partnership with BlockTexx forms just one pillar of the sustainability strategy for the business. "We're not looking at it like a trial. We're launching with BlockTexx and then refining and taking learnings to improve volumes with them. Launching shortly in the seven capital cities will be denim amnesty bins and we'll take learnings and apply it to scale to all stores. Customers can return denim to our stores from any brand and they'll be rewarded for returning with a voucher. We're also putting plans in place to eliminate plastic bags and installing LED lighting," he says.

7 Clare Press VOGUE AUSTRALIA SUSTAINABILITY EDITOR-AT-LARGE

"Many of the conversations over the coming days will be about the climate crisis reaching crunch point," Clare Press said as she crossed to a panel of experts at the 2019 Copenhagen Fashion Summit. Press' influence in the sustainability space extends well beyond Australian shores, sitting on Copenhagen Fashion Week's Sustainability Advisory Board and contributing to international forums such as Global Fashion Agenda. As an advocate for the circular economy and CSR, she also presents a regular podcast series called 'Wardrobe Crisis', featuring the likes of Ellen MacArthur, Livia Firth, Roland Mouret and Rosario Dawson.



8 Ian Moir WOOLWORTHS (SOUTH AFRICA) CEO

It's been a mixed year for Woolworths CEO Ian Moir. In February, local subsidiary Country Road Group reported total sales growth of 2.3% for the half year to December 30. The Group credited margin growth to a strong focus around full-priced sales, as well as good inventory management. Sales grew 0.5% on a like-for-like basis, with gross profit margin up 0.3% to 64%. The picture was much bleaker for its most recent acquisition David Jones, however. In the second writedown since its \$2.2 billion purchase in 2014, its value was reduced to \$985 million this year. Blaming "unprecedented" economic pressures for the move, Moir vowed a comeback was still on the cards following a \$200 million overhaul of its Sydney flagship and a \$350

million investment in a systems overhaul. "We know we need a new model, we know we need a new future."

9 Peter Alexander PETER ALEXANDER FOUNDER

In a volatile retail climate, lifestyle retailer Peter Alexander continues to be a consistent performer. The brand is well ahead of plans to deliver in excess of \$250 million in annual sales by fiscal 2020. This year, it delivered record half year sales of \$130.4 million, up 14.1% on 1H18. Part of Solomon Lew's Premier Retail Group, the brand opened five new stores and continued the expansion of its plus size and children's sleepwear lines. It also continued to deliver significant online sales growth, vowing to grow investment in the channel. "You have to be flexible and understand the ever-changing environment of the fashion industry," Alexander says. "The landscape has changed so dramatically since I started."



10 Michael Hardwick COTTON ON GROUP CFO

In May, Cotton On Group CFO Michael Hardwick flew to Amsterdam on an important mission. It was green in purpose – but not the type the city is normally associated with. He was there to accept an award for 'Responsible Retailer Initiative of The Year' at the World Retail Congress. The Group's green credentials were recognised on the international stage, with its sustainable cotton program in Kenya the most notable achievement. Since its inception, the program has been the catalyst for major economic activity in the region, with the Kenyan Government now announcing plans to replicate the model nationally. It launched with only 15 farmers in 2014 and today has more than 2,500 farmers engaged and 10,000 to be supported by 2020. "Over the last 27 years, we have developed our business through being resourceful and finding a better way," he says. "We're committed to conducting business ethically and sustainably."

11 Christine Centenera WARDROBE NYC CO-FOUNDER

Long-known for her reputation as a global style force – centrally through her work with Vogue Australia – Centenera has added retail disrupter to her resume. Her fashion venture with designer

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Josh Goot, Wardrobe NYC is becoming a pioneer in the direct-to-consumer retail model. Designed in NYC and made in Italy, Wardrobe NYC produces small collections throughout the year in packs of around four and eight pieces, ranging from \$500 to \$3000 in price. The releases are themed - streetwear, tailoring, denim - and produced in limited quantities as a rebuke to the industry's consumption cycle. "Our experience in the industry has led us to think about a better and more egalitarian way to practice the elements of design and communication that we love, and at the same time, improve the business model so that it's more efficient and less wasteful."



12 Daniel Bracken MICHAEL HILL CEO

This year, jewellery chain Michael Hill revealed it underpaid staff by as much as \$25 million over the past six years, joining a list of companies to admit wage discrepancies. But it was the action taken by freshly appointed CEO Daniel Bracken that deserves recognition. It was he who instigated an initial review of store staff contracts and found "non-compliance" with the applicable award rates. The historic misapplication of the retail award had been unerring for six years - with Bracken taking immediate action to rectify the oversight. A more detailed review by auditors PricewaterhouseCoopers is being undertaken "with urgency" to determine exactly how much each worker is owed. "We have self-discovered this issue, we're going to resolve this matter as a priority, we're going to pay affected team members what is owed to them," Bracken says.

13 Peter Mitchley-Hughes POLITIX MD

There's a lot to be said for a power team - and with the support of recent hires, Politix MD Peter Mitchley-Hughes is playing a solid game. Since joining the business, he has focussed on ensuring its end-to-end supply chain is fit for purpose. "I am driving the team very hard towards a dynamic fashion model for men," he says. "We've worked hard to create an efficient supply chain which goes from design to stores in less than 90 days, and our repeats will happen in 40-50 days. We are constantly challenging the way we work." Backed by head of creative and design Paul Burden and head of marketing Richard Dalke, the trio are also refreshing the brand with a modern fashion edge. "Suiting is actually about 30% of our business. Casual is growing and really establishing itself as a big part of our business. Most people don't go to the office or to events in a suit and tie anymore, it's now a mix of different styles," he says.

14 Stella Smith Stevens COUNTRY ROAD MENSWEAR DESIGNER

It's no secret Country Road has a sweeping sustainability strategy in place, with a time-bound target to make each product more sustainable by 2020. It's also designers such as Stella Smith Stevens who are translating these targets into reality. "Internationally our industry is making massive strides in improving our production practises," she says. "Country Road has made a commitment to ensure all products have a sustainable attribute by 2020. We feel passionately that denim is an area of focus within our brand that needs to lead the way." This includes the introduction of its mainline denim which uses Refibra (recycled cotton scraps and wood pulp) and green label wash which uses 35L water (compared to average 70L) per pair of jeans. Country Road is also working with other bodies such as the Better Cotton Initiative to include more sustainable fabrics and treatments in ranges.

15 Zoe Ghani THE ICONIC CTO

She was hired in September 2015 as director of product - and just three years later, Zoe Ghani was promoted as CTO of The Iconic. Since her appointment, the retailer has pioneered a number of technology innovations such as Snap To Shop, Find



Your Fit and Follow the Brand features. The Iconic has achieved over two million mobile app downloads, making it the most downloaded fashion app in Australia, and receives 13 million online visits per month. The Iconic's mobile-first strategy continues to hit new targets, with seven out of every 10 visits to the site via mobile. The Iconic offers a range of delivery options and made history last month for unleashing drone deliveries across Canberra. "At The Iconic we learn, build and test features based on what our customers tell us," Ghani says. "The need for urgent delivery is something most people can relate to. Drone delivery will be an incredible solution for life's tricky situations," she says.

16 Daniel Agostinelli ACCENT GROUP CEO

Another financial year. Another record result. Accent Group reported a 22.5% increase in statutory net profit to \$53.9 million for fiscal 2019, with earnings increasing 22.5% to \$108.9 million. Accent Group CEO Daniel Agostinelli said new store formats, reduced discounting and surging online sales helped deliver the result. "Our retail business continues to go from strength to strength. We continue to evolve our in-store design and [introduce] new customer experience elements including shoe cleaning, monogramming services and permanent DJ booths in the Platypus megastores. TAF has commenced the roll-out of MyFIT 3D, the latest foot scanning technology that scans a customer's foot and delivers real-time product recommendations." The Group is one to watch in 2020: it has plans to roll out a new footwear concept, Pivot, aimed at providing value-conscious families with branded goods.

17 Akira Isogawa AKIRA ISOGAWA FOUNDER

Proving longevity exists in designer fashion, Akira Isogawa has a career spanning over 25 years. In fact, at the turn of last year his work was celebrated in an exclusive exhibition at the Powerhouse Museum in

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Sydney with an opening speech delivered by industry powerbroker Naomi Milgrom. Born in Kyoto, Japan, Akira arrived and introduced his signature East-West fusion. Manipulation of fabric, form and distinctive 'fold' design elements have captivated fashion audiences around the world. "One can come and one can go and it could happen very quickly," he says. "So actually having a solid business for more than two decades for me is actually a thing that I feel that I'm proud of." He attributes his lengthy time in the industry to his rejection of trend-driven designs and instead focussing on timeless pieces. "We believe in slower fashion rather than faster fashion," he says.



18 Mark Teperson ACCENT GROUP CDO

There's a reason Accent Group CDO Mark Teperson receives so many industry accolades: when it comes to digital, he's the best in the business. Digital group sales grew 93% during fiscal 2019 and are on track to achieve 20% digital sales within the next three years. A range of new initiatives were implemented this year, including new websites launched for Subtype, The Trybe and Vans NZ and the rollout of endless aisle and same day delivery. Today, the profitability of the digital channel continues to grow and is now equivalent to the profitability rate of stores. The integrated inventory model, enabled through click-and-collect, click-and-dispatch and endless aisle, provides customers access to Accent's entire inventory base. So what's next for Teperson and his league of digital innovators? Growth will be driven through continuing to evolve its 17 brand websites, improving customer experience on digital platforms and better targeting customers by leveraging a 4.8 million strong database and new web-based, AI-driven CRM technology.

19 Raju Vuppapapati R.M. WILLIAMS CEO

In May, iconic Australian boot-maker R.M. Williams was placed for sale

after years of stewardship under CEO Raju Vuppapapati. The brand, backed by the private equity arm of LVMH, was looking to go under the hammer for as much as \$500 million. The Singapore-based L Carterton Asia brought in investment bank Goldman Sachs to look for buyers and run an auction for the Adelaide-based company later this year. Vuppapapati scaled the business to around 50 retail shopfronts, including outlets in New York, London, New Zealand and Scandinavia and 500 department stores. R.M. Williams' sales have been growing thanks to his global push, coming in at \$142 million last financial year. That was up from \$126 million in 2017. "We wanted to be sure we're being deliberate and not too quick - do it properly," he says of the brand's growth. "This brand deserves that respect."

20 Elizabeth Abegg SPELL & THE GYPSY COLLECTIVE - CO-FOUNDER

It's situated outside the fashion capitals of Melbourne and Sydney. But for Byron-based Spell & The Gypsy Collective, which draws 80% of its revenue via direct-to-consumer sales, it's possible to run a profitable business and stay true to your roots. "From our factories to our manufacturing methods to our everyday footprint here in Byron Bay, our vision is to continue to create beautiful garments that also inspire change towards truly sustainable fashion," Abegg says. The brand's bohemian designs have attracted a cult celebrity following, which includes Alessandra Ambrosio, Elsa Pataky, Jessica Alba and Chrissy Teigen. It started as many Australian fashion brands do: with a market stall selling hand-made wares.

21 Gary Novis RETAIL APPAREL GROUP CEO

Retail Apparel Group CEO Gary Novis is delivering for new owners The Foschini Group (TFG). It bought out the menswear retailer for \$302 million two years ago, snapping up brands such



as Yd, Connor, Johnny Big and Tarocash. Under Novis' leadership, the brand house continues to deliver with TFG looking at double-digit toppling growth this year. "Retailers that have not reinvented themselves and made sure their product is right aren't going to do well," he says. Retail Apparel Group operates around 400 stores nationally, as well as eCommerce platforms and activewear label Rockwear.

22 Theo Onisforou THE INTERSECTION FOUNDER

"The great threat to Australian fashion retail is the homogeneous chain stores trying to sell a \$100 disposable garment. They want everyone around the world to buy the same garment at that price point. From my point of view, I am repulsed by homogenous fashion, but it's a reality you can't stop and it's here. The main reason why we are at The Intersection is that we aren't competing with H & M and the Zaras." For close to 20 years, The Intersection founder Theo Onisforou has leased his Paddington precinct to local designers and independent labels only. Situated in the heart of Sydney's style district, it houses brands such as Bassike, Dion Lee and Ginger & Smart. Onisforou is a strong advocate for local designers, with an Australian Fashion Walk Of Fame recognising leading lights.

23 Nelson Mair LUXURY RETAIL GROUP DIRECTOR

While middle-market retailers struggle to combat sluggish conditions, the luxury category continues to grow. In recent years, Luxury Retail Group has expanded the local footprint of brands such as Furla and Folli Follie before handing back the profitable businesses to their parent companies. It has a number of premium brands in its portfolio, including Sneakerboy, Balenciaga and Mulberry. The luxury retailing industry has grown at a rapid pace over the past five years, with revenue growing an annualised 10.2% over the five years through 2017-18 to \$2.1 billion.

24 Mark Baartse SHOWPO CMO

With over three million social media followers, Showpo makes millions in revenue via search, Facebook, email and other digital channels. Baartse, who has led the brand's marketing strategy since 2016, has enacted a range of digital initiatives

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to almost double Showpo's sales in 12 months. "The team has done a lot of work over the last few years on the complete customer journey, from our increasingly heavy investment in artificial intelligence to our deep focus on the customer experience," he says. "We now have AI solutions behind our CRM, search, social and visual merchandising. Despite the hype of AI, we are still seeing the need for more people. It's exciting to expand the team across a range of areas including brand, CRM, social and digital," he says.

25 Sally Lennox TARGET AUSTRALIA HEAD OF DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

At a 2018 strategy day for Wesfarmers, legendary department stores CEO Guy Russo praised the steady progress in Target's online business. In addition to a central distribution centre to pick, pack and ship orders to customers, it was reducing delivery times to customers through in-store fulfilment of digital purchases. For head of digital experience Sally Lennox, it was about progressively rolling out the service to stores rather than a blanket solution nationally. "We started very slowly - you don't need to turn on every single store to begin with." It is just one pillar in a full turnaround strategy for the discount department store, which is using loyalty data to drive a customer-led omnichannel strategy. How far can the data drill down? It knows the average Target customer is a mother who spends 15 minutes in the store and is most likely to shop for (in order) her home, kids and, finally, for herself.

26 Shane Fallscheer LOVISA MANAGING DIRECTOR

Despite describing fiscal 2019 as one of the most difficult trading periods in recent times, Lovisa managing director Shane Fallscheer still delivered a solid result. Revenue was up 15.3% year on year to \$250.3 million, bolstered by the addition of 64 new stores throughout the year. While same store sales were down 0.5%, Fallscheer says softer trading conditions in the first half and the lack of major trends in the fashion jewellery space dented the result. Lovisa draws the majority of its revenue from Australia, which has 154 locations, with a move into the US market currently sitting at 28 stores in California, Texas, Florida and Illinois. Lovisa reported a 2.8% in earnings before interest and tax to \$52.5 million.

27 Blake Williams AUSTRALIAN FASHION LABELS CEO

There are many reasons Australian Fashion Labels CEO Blake Williams could be recognised for leading the group. It's his knack for cracking the Chinese market which lands him in the Power 30 this year. The brand house, which includes labels Keepsake and C/Meo Collective, has seen revenue in China grow from zero to \$7 million in four years. It is now stocked in 300 retail stores and doing cross border eCommerce from Hong Kong. It's no easy feat either. "There's a lot of bureaucracy and a lot of licenses involved," he says. "This is to enable you both to trade and to hold an internet content provider license, which you have to have before you can even have an internet web address beyond the Great Wall of China. That takes six to nine months to secure, so it's all about working within the challenges of that market." It has paid off, with 20% of users logging in from a Chinese language computer to access the company's online store BNKR.



28 Kirrily Johnston HUSK CREATIVE DIRECTOR

How do you reinvent a boutique brand with over two decades of trade, without disrupting loyal customers? That was the question facing creative director Kirrily Johnston, when she designed her first full collection for the brand in autumn 2017. Fast forward to today and her directional designs now contribute 60% of revenue, fusing the brand's rich tapestry of influencers with a modern aesthetic. "The biggest challenge for Husk was online because the well-known brands that we'd been heroing



and that our clients wanted, all of a sudden had massive visibility," she says. "They were on Net-A-Porter, ShopBop, delivery was free to door, it gave us massive restrictions with margin." And so commenced another overhaul: discovering niche designer brands which aligned with the Husk customer. "The discovery brands also allowed us to protect our margins because those brands weren't easily shoppable online, so we could deliver them when we wanted to at the price we needed to and protect the bottom line in the business," she says.

29 Angela Langmann AMAZON FASHION AUSTRALIA GM

Australian shoppers love to shop local brands, according to analysis by Amazon Fashion Australia GM Angela Langmann. Langmann has been pushing for greater representation of domestic labels on the international platform and says local markets are a great place to find Australian brands. "We're known for being a tech company, but what's interesting is that we have some very low-tech, grass roots way of finding brands," she says. "So alongside looking at the data, we also go to local markets, and just see what's trending there. Paddington Markets is a great place to go, some great Australian brands have their roots there." In 2017, she attended the Finders Keepers Market and sourced headwear brand Will and Bear for the Amazon platform.

30 Emily Rice PETA AUSTRALIA OUTREACH AND PARTNERSHIPS LIAISON

In a year when Prada Group ditched fur and the issue of animal welfare reached headlines, Emily Rice ensured the movement hit local shores too. Following a PETA video exposé, Australian Fashion Labels and One Teaspoon both confirmed cashmere would not appear in future collections. The decision came after PETA provided the Australian businesses with video footage of the killing of cashmere goats in China and Mongolia, which produce 90% of the world's cashmere. "By committing to policies banning cashmere from future collections, both Australian Fashion Labels and One Teaspoon have made not only a compassionate decision but also a savvy business move," Small says.

"Nowadays, consumers are looking to buy from ethical brands that are kind to animals - and the planet." ■



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