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The Tech 20

Ragtrader spotlights
the most tech-savvy
Australian retail players.

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STYLE ARCADE



1 Ian Bailey Kmart Group Australia MD

Kmart Group is aiming to future-proof its business through a disruptive digital research and development project in Seattle. The result? Bailey and his team are already pushing new boundaries, including the launch of an online AR experience allowing customers to envision products in their own home. Kmart Group is also trialling the use of robot Tori in stores, securing real-time stock information using RFID technology. "All of this work is taking place against the backdrop of the greatest challenge that the retail sector has seen in generations, the global COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions to contain it," Bailey tells *Ragtrader*.



2 Melissa Drennan The Iconic chief growth officer

With the onset of a global pandemic, The Iconic had no choice but to accelerate growth projects in 2020/21. This included the launch of an outlet and beauty destination, as well as an upgraded marketplace offering and new consignment model. In fact, onboarding times for new suppliers halved as a result. This year, the acceleration continues with The Iconic becoming one of the first Australian businesses to leverage new YouTube technology allowing consumers to shop featured outfits. "As a retailer born in the years that followed the GFC, thriving through periods of disruption is something we're well acquainted with," Drennan says.



3 Jane McNally Camilla CEO

It's not just major retailers which have been quick to pivot their digital arsenal during the pandemic. Designer brand Camilla was forced to migrate its annual warehouse sale online, photographing and packaging 5000 individual SKUs as well as setting up a dedicated site from scratch. Not only did the sale generate more revenue than its physical counterpart, it was the start of a virtual program rollout including remote VIP shopping activations. "All of this connectivity work has resulted in an engaged team, retention and expansion of our customer base and some truly amazing online trade results," McNally says.

4 Paul Tinkler Lululemon Australia and New Zealand MD

Technology doesn't just enable sales – it can also empower teams in isolation, as Tinkler discovered during pandemic lockdowns. "We quickly began to realise how disconnected people were feeling," he says. "We're a very close-knit organisation and we're very connected to our community as well. We focused on tools and frameworks that would support our people in that time and that allowed them to engage with these tools to lead their teams and themselves." One example was the brand's Practising Resiliency series, which was a digital development offering that focused on how to lead through uncertainty. This was also offered externally to Lululemon's ambassador collective and brand partners.

5 Gary Williams Rebel MD

If there's one thing Williams understands, it's the power of loyalty. During lockdowns,

Rebel transacted five years-worth of treadmills in three weeks as it made the most of its three million-strong customer database. The strategy saw the business' digital channel grow 49% during lockdown, with sales to loyalty customers in particular making up 66% of Rebel sales. "I am most pleased with how our tested strategy helped us weather this challenging year," he says. Overall, Rebel's digital sales made up 14% of total sales with click and collect accounting for 30% of these sales in FY2020.

6 Daniel Bracken Michael Hill CEO

Going from 300 stores to just one digital shopfront during lockdown forced Michael Hill to think outside the box. The ring box in particular. Seeing bridal purchases grow from 10-15% of sales online to 30-35% during lockdown, Michael Hill rolled out a virtual ring builder, virtual appointments and virtual ring-try ons, the latter of which saw 22,000 customers uptake. "That's one of the blessings in disguise from COVID; we educated our customers that digital is a safe channel to operate in," Bracken says. "Bridal still represents north of 20% of our online business so it's dramatically changed customer behaviours and how they interact with us in the digital channels."



7 Brendan Sweeney Cotton On eCommerce GM

Cotton On operates 1500 stores in 20 countries, alongside a thriving online business. Has the global pandemic changed the retail group's expansion strategy? Yes, says Sweeney. "I'm lucky enough to work in a business where the Board has been pretty committed to digital transformation," he says. "For us, it's mainly about an acceleration of what we have been doing and almost like a validation of the investments that we were making." In addition to doubling down on automation and capacity in distribution centres, the group is digitising its international footprint. "We're doing quite a lot of work on where we can find the right international marketplaces to position the brand well. We'll probably go first on expanding our online offering to those

countries and potentially making them digital-only. It's quite a difference from a few years ago where our first move would have been 10 stores and a distribution centre."

8 Justin Hillberg SurfStitch MD

As consumers spend more time between home, work and play, SurfStitch has moved to ensure its product offering is in line with demand. "We've expanded our product offering by adding over

100 new brands into new categories such as home and body," Hillberg explains. "Using marketplace technology, we now have huge potential to rapidly scale our current offering and grow into new categories." In 2020, the marketplace categories grew by over 60%. In turn, SurfStitch has commenced offering 3PL services for partners. "Stitch3PL is now a meaningful contributor to our net profit and continues to grow," Hillberg says.



delighted with the way our team executed through the all-important November cyber events and the lead up to Christmas," he says, noting the focus on virtual executions, vertical brands and VIP customers.

"Our strong focus and capability in digital, combined with operational excellence in merchandise and store execution has delivered a strong, trading led result. We continue our focus on Virtual, Vertical and VIP with our growth initiatives progressing well across the board." The company's store network and digital fulfilment capability allowed it to fulfil significant volumes of online Christmas customer orders placed up until December 22, in time for Christmas Day.

9 Eva Barrett Kathmandu chief customer officer

In the same day Barrett was announced as Kathmandu's chief customer officer, she revealed a partnership to offer same-day delivery with Uber. The move made it the first Australian apparel brand to do so – and at a time when customers were navigating lockdown. "When we looked at our customers during that time, it was winter, it was cold, if a customer wants to get a jacket in a couple of hours, why do they need to wait a week or two because of the delays that were happening?" During the half-year, 60 Greater Melbourne stores were closed for more than 11 weeks and 14 Auckland stores were closed for over two weeks. Driving customer-first strategies, online sales increased from 8.9% in H1 FY20 to 13% in H1 FY21.

10 Daniel Agostinelli Accent Group CEO

Accent Group clocked a record 110% growth in digital sales to \$108.1 million in the first half of fiscal 2021. For Agostinelli, now long accustomed to a strong eCommerce result, the key was a three pillar strategy: Virtual, Vertical and VIP. "I am

11 Franchesca Cubillo The Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Foundation (DAAFF) chair

Franchesca Cubillo is a *Larrakia, Bardi, Wardaman* and *Yanuwa* woman from the 'Top End' of the Northern Territory, who chairs the DAAFF. The Fair has had a meteoric year in fashion, with its Country To Couture program clocking over 10,000 views on Facebook when it aired. Streamed on the NITV and Indigenous Fashion Projects' Facebook pages, the event video was also shared more than 150 times as it engaged viewers in the digital age. A popular staple on the Darwin calendar, Country To Couture has been a key attraction, alongside the annual Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair since 2016. Ngali Australia's Denni Francisco was among those featured in this year's lineup: "When I began, I reflected what fashion as a platform could do to celebrate our culture to a wider audience."



12 Doug Low Incu CEO

When it comes to independent retailers, Incu is among those leading the pack in digital transformation. The designer streetwear chain recently launched virtual shopping on its site, with shoppers using the service 11 times more likely to make a purchase. Shoppers can connect with an in-store expert via live video, text and messaging to receive further information about products, demonstrations and personalised advice. The software allows associates to see what customers are browsing online in real-time, making it easy to provide customised product recommendations. Team members can also use the platform to schedule in-store appointments, stay in touch with shoppers via text to share product updates, recommend complementary items, or notify Incu customers when a product is back in stock. "The personal touch and curation that each of our team members brings is what makes Incu, Incu," Low says.



13 Paul Watson Witchery digital manager

Witchery recently celebrated 50 years in business – and even with its rich retail legacy, the brand is not about to slow down. The retailer is accelerating its omnichannel strategy, building a 360-degree view of customers across physical and digital touchpoints. "This translates into things like improving online 'find-in-store' functionality, local inventory ads through Google, online targeted offers to be specifically redeemed in-store and optimising our online performance marketing to drive online and offline sales by feeding that data back via loyalty member data matching," Watson says. "From a first-party data perspective, it includes things like personalised product recommendations through the website and email, and bespoke rewards and offers to loyalty program members."

14 Craig Fuller Amazon Australia director of operations

Why be a pureplay when you can be an omniplay operator? Amazon Australia negotiated a partnership with Australian department store Myer during COVID-19, creating a network of physical Amazon parcel pickup sites. The partnership combined online and offline realms by allowing customers to collect parcels from nominated

Myer stores. "Not only does it provide our customers with more control, but it enables them to enjoy a quick and simple pickup experience at Myer's network of conveniently located stores," Fuller says. Amazon was the biggest online winner during the Christmas quarter, with Semrush reporting website visits up more than 55 million.

15 Natalie Xenita IMG Fashion APAC executive director

Afterpay Australian Fashion Week 2021 will throw open the doors to consumers and facilitate digital-first transaction opportunities. A series of consumer see-now, buy-now runway shows will make up a special showcase featuring the likes of Bassike, KITX and Manning Cartell. The interactive runway initiative comes after IMG successfully piloted the platform at New York Fashion Week, bringing the same opportunities to the Australian fashion industry. "AAFW: The Experience opens the doors of fashion week to directly advance designers' retail businesses and creates opportunity to drive loyalty amongst new and existing customers," Xenita says. "We are thrilled to reconnect with live audiences at Carriageworks with this curated program of runway shows and informative fashion events, to entertain and engage fashion's most passionate consumers."



16 Dr Wayne Best Nanollose executive chairman

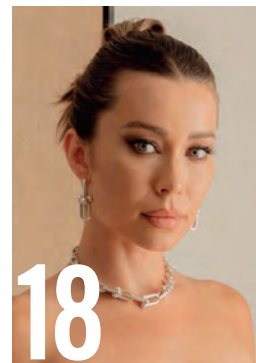
Technology in fashion means more than just omnichannel opportunities. Nanollose Limited, a company listed on the Australian Securities Exchange, has filed a joint patent application for a production process that has the ability to produce an environmentally friendly 'Nullarbor' lyocell fibre using microbial cellulose instead of tree pulp. The joint patent application is for a reportedly superior and environmentally friendly lyocell, which is finer than silk and significantly stronger than conventional lyocell made from wood pulp. "We are extremely pleased with the progress of our collaboration with Grasm and Birla Cellulose which has already delivered this patent application," Best says. "The Nullarbor fibre produced by the team at Birla Cellulose has exceeded our expectations, and we now have a fibre that is not only more eco-friendly but has superior properties over conventional tree-based fibres."

17 Dewi Cooke The Social Studio CEO

The Social Studio is all about empowering young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds through education and employment in fashion. It amplified this last year when it opened its Collingwood Yards retail space alongside a new eCommerce platform, ahead of Christmas trade. Merging philanthropy with technology will allow The Social Studio to extend its work. "We're thrilled to be throwing our support behind some of the country's most exciting, socially-conscious makers," Cooke says. "Our mission at the Studio is to celebrate and elevate the talents of diverse communities, and we hope that by creating this platform we will help to not only focus the spotlight on the incredible skills and talents of emerging BIPOC and CALD designers but amplify their stories and voices too," she says.

18 Rozalia Russian Influencer

She's the Australian influencer who can sell-out SKUs with a single post. In fact, womenswear brand Atoir asked Russian



back for a repeat collaboration after the inaugural venture sold out in 20 minutes and generated \$2 million in sales. "The best engagement for me is always around key events on the calendar such as the Spring Racing Carnival, Portsea Polo and Fashion Week," Russian says. "Each event allows a realistic view into how you wear an outfit, how you logically style it and how you carry yourself."

She also believes in long-term strategy over short-term wins. "Gone are the days of one-off promotional posts, the new trends are looking at long term, collaborative partnerships with someone who represents the brands values as well as their look and feel."

19 Sarah Timmerman Beginning Boutique founder

As an independent operator who's leveraged digital channels to grow her business, Timmerman has a lot to celebrate. But in 2020, she chose to spotlight the work undertaken by her BB Better Initiative, aimed at setting ethical and sustainable fashion benchmarks. As part of this, her online boutique donated a whopping 3,280kg of clothing, saving 39,000 garments from landfill. The business also donated \$350,000 to charity and secured 50% ethical accreditation from own brand suppliers. That's just the tip of an iceberg that stretches from sustainable garment ranges to diversity initiatives within the business. "As we enter 2021, our journey is just getting started, as we pledge to be better for the People, the Planet and the Future," she says.

20 Pip Edwards P.E Nation co-founder

Always the trendsetter, P.E Nation recently launched an Instagram try-on filter to allow customers to experience its first-ever stand-alone, sustainable snow collection. Using the filter, customers could virtually try on three select snow jackets from the 15-piece range. Edwards said that with global travel bans in place, the business wanted to recreate the snow experience digitally. "We're living and working within a new societal normcore on a global scale. Products are no longer limited to curated imagery and look books, but rather experiences that have augmented the way our customers interact and engage with them." ■

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