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# *The Power 30*

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# The Power 30

Imogen Bailey reveals who made the list of influential fashion leaders this year.



## 1 Eloise Monaghan Honey Birdette founder and CEO

Pulling off a multi-million-dollar acquisition deal in the midst of a global pandemic is no easy feat. Yet, Honey Birdette's founder Eloise Monaghan managed to do just that. Following the rapid global expansion the brand had undertaken – especially in the US – over the past two years, as well as continued successes in its product, the brand was snapped up by PLBY Group for USD\$333 million in cash and stock. “When I founded Honey Birdette 15 years ago, my ambition was to build a brand for women, by women; a brand that would serve as a platform for confidence and sexual and body empowerment,” Monaghan said. “I am immensely proud of everything we've accomplished – with 60 thriving stores across three countries – powered by 350 fierce female ambassadors,” she said. The deal will see PLBY Group accelerate Honey Birdette's growth, while also tapping into the Aussie brand's product design, sourcing and direct-to-consumer capabilities to grow the Playboy range of products.

## 2 Reuben Casey Kathmandu CEO

Launching its new brand direction during a pandemic was probably not the way Kathmandu expected to roll out the new

position. Yet, it still pulled it off, under Reuben Casey's leadership. Refreshing its imagery, brand voice, product and internal culture, the business launched the new direction to appeal to younger consumers. “They're the biggest spenders and they're the biggest participants in the outdoors,” Casey said. “So that's really a segment that we need to make sure we remain relevant with so we decided that, to do that, we need to make sure we stand out,” he said. On a mission to become the ‘world's most loved outdoor brand,’ Casey said that the addition of CCO Eva Barrett and head of product Robert Fry to the team helped bring the strategy to life.

## 3 Tania Austin Decjuba owner and CEO

2021 has been a year of partnerships for Tania Austin's Decjuba. In July, the brand's nationwide team of 1,400 helped the Australian Retailers Association and Afterpay pilot their new financial literacy course. “We were thrilled to give our teams first access to a financial literacy educational platform that will help them grow both professionally and personally,” Austin said. Then in August, the brand partnered with Upparel to give customers a new way to recycle



their old denim. As part of that collaboration, Decjuba launched an ‘add-to-cart’ digital method of recycling, which allowed consumers purchase a prepaid satchel to post their denim for recycling. The initiative resonated, with 2,241 satchels bought within the first two weeks of the partnership.

## 4 Shane Lenton Cue CIO

Leading a digital team during a time when digital shopping experiences five years' worth of growth in five months is no easy task. Yet, Shane Lenton didn't shy away from the challenge. Instead, Lenton and Cue rolled out sophisticated virtual shopping and a multi-channel wishlist. The virtual shopping, AI-backed platform saw 60% of sessions result in a transaction, and the average transaction value was five times normal. Meanwhile, its multi-channel wishlist takes the best bits of an online wishlist and brings it to the store environment. Similarly, the results are impressive, with the wishlist driving \$100,000 per month of directly attributed purchases. “This program is actually driving a lot of people back into store, who are traditionally in store customers,” Lenton said of the wishlist. “That's their preference on how they want to shop, but now they're getting notified.”

## 5 Bridget Veals David Jones general manager of womenswear, footwear and accessories

Bridget Veals has become a sort of ‘face-of-change’ at David Jones. She is heavily involved in the department store's Pathways Program in partnership with Indigenous Fashion Projects (IFP). The program provides an opportunity for Indigenous fashion brands to tap into the expertise of leading Australian designers to gain practical experience, insights and advice at all stages of the development of

a fashion label. Additionally, Veals was also on the judging panel of Melbourne Fashion Festival's National Designer Award, which fosters emerging talent in the Australian fashion industry. This year's winner, Commas, received a cash prize, a DJs window takeover, presence on the Gala Runway and ranging across DJs stores.



## 6 Sacha Laing General Pants CEO

Despite the challenges of lockdowns, General Pants is on a mission to expand to 65 stores across Australia and New Zealand. The expansion strategy follows the opening of eight stores across ANZ in the past 12 months, including three in New Zealand following a successful market launch in 2019. The openings come ahead of the business' 50th anniversary, Laing said. "In 2019, the business completed a comprehensive reset of our forward strategy and despite the challenges of COVID, the business has executed well ahead of our plan and we are well positioned for the next phase of growth," he said. Helping to drive the growth are Laing's new hires, Kate Phelps and Paul Budrikis, as well as the promotion of Jacq Vuleta to chief customer officer.

## 7 Daniel Agostinelli Accent Group CEO

Daniel Agostinelli wasn't going to let the pandemic slow Accent's growth down. Instead, the footwear giant confirmed its entrance into apparel with the \$13 million acquisition of Glue Store and its

wholesale and distribution business Next Athleisure. And growth is on the agenda for Glue under Accent, with plans to grow the brand's retail footprint from 22 stores to 50 stores. Glue also brings its own vertical brands to Accent, which ties perfectly into Accent's Vertical, Virtual, VIP strategy. "The acquisition is perfectly aligned to our strategy to grow our leadership position in the lifestyle and youth apparel market in Australia and New Zealand," Agostinelli said. Additionally, Accent's own in-house brands including Stylerunner, 4Workers, Platypus and Pivot have continued their bricks-and-mortar expansion this year.

## 8 Rob Cromb Kookai MD

Kookai didn't waste any time launching its \$1 million boutique at Vicinity's Emporium Shopping Centre in Melbourne's CBD on June 12. Emerging from lockdown with a brand-new boutique was a testament to the brand's confidence in the future of bricks-and-mortar shopping. So confident is Kookai in this future, it has plans to open at least eight more boutiques across Australia within the next two years, as well as entering new global markets in the northern hemisphere. "I truly believe the fashion customer will always seek out that in-person experience and, in return, we hope to always offer new ways for her to live that experience with expanding our store network, creating new store design concepts and offering her something that's uniquely Kookai," Cromb said.

## 9 Grace Lillian Lee First Nations Fashion Design founder and director

As the founder of First Nations Fashion and Design (FNFD), Grace Lillian Lee has seen first-hand the beauty, skill and connection to culture First Nations fashion offers. And being able to facilitate and present First Nations designers on the Afterpay Australian Fashion Week runway for the first time was an honour, Lee said. "Indigenous fashion is the future of the Australian fashion industry, and what an honour it was to be featured as the first Indigenous runway show at AAFW's 25th Anniversary, amplifying Indigenous voices for the next generation and chapter in AAFW history," she said.



## 10 Tanya Deans Hanes Brands Australasia president

In a tribute to Tanya Deans' leadership, skill and dedication to Hanes Brands Australasia, she was named the president of the business in February. Deans took up the role with 25 years of experience at Hanes, most recently as group GM of Bras N Things for two years, and previous to that, as the GM of brands at Hanes for four years. As president, Deans leads 4,400 team members across brands including Bonds, Champion, Bras N Things and Sheridan. She is also responsible for the company's eCommerce business and a network of more than 450 stores. "Tanya brings a clear vision for the future, and I look forward to working with her as we apply her experience and learnings to drive growth across our global organisation," Hanes Brands CEO Steve Bratspies said of her appointment.



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### 11 Daniel Gutstein Puma Oceania GM

Daniel Gutstein is a big believer in Aussie retail. That's why he's behind Puma's largest Australian flagship store at Chadstone. The 330sqm space showcases Puma's sports heritage with a focus on football, running, training and basketball and also features a dedicated 'shopper engagement' space which occupies a 16sqm area in the centre of the store. Gutstein said the store is the result of significant growth of the Puma brand. "Puma continues to outperform our growth targets in the region, and the Chadstone store opening increases the Puma brand presence in Australia," Gutstein said. "The opening of our Chadstone store demonstrates the confidence we have in the future of bricks-and-mortar retail in Australia," he said.

### 12 Erica Berchtold The Iconic CEO

The Iconic brought adaptive fashion to the mainstream with the launch of its Adaptive Edit in August. The impact of this launch is hugely significant, with 20% of Australia's population living with a disability. To bring the edit to customers, The Iconic worked closely with leading global accessibility consultancy, All Is For All, to ensure the launch of the new category was created with a considered approach, informed by lived experiences. Berchtold said while the business was proud to launch the Adaptive Edit, it recognised it still had more to do. "The Iconic Adaptive Edit is only the beginning as we continue to drive progress towards a more inclusive, accessible and empowering shopping experience for every ANZ customer, irrespective of ability," she said.

### 13 Daniel Bracken Michael Hill CEO

Despite losing 10,447 trading days due to lockdowns around the world, Michael Hill still delivered strong results for the year. The jeweller reported that same store sales were up 8.6% against prior year, and up 10.0% against FY19, while all store sales were up 13.5% for the year. Daniel Bracken puts this performance down to the brand's transformation strategy, which he has been leading. "This performance provides further evidence that our strategic transformation agenda is on track and delivering," Bracken said. "We've seen record digital sales, our loyalty program going from strength to strength, further deployment of omnichannel initiatives, and continued evolution of our product offering, go-to-market campaigns and retail fundamentals," he said.

### 14 Matt Furlong Amazon Australia country manager

This year, Amazon Australia made its entry into the \$46 billion second-hand goods market with Amazon Warehouse. The site offers discounted pre-owned and open-box items across 30 categories including apparel, electronics, home improvement, kitchen, books, music and toys. The addition of Amazon Warehouse increased the eTailor's already-enormous SKU count, adding to the 125 million products on the Amazon Australia website. "Amazon Warehouse gives these products a new lease on life and offers customers an even wider selection to choose from," Furlong said of the launch.

### 15 David Thomas Brandbank Group CEO

Brandbank Group didn't waste any time getting down to business in 2021. The group, which houses brands Seed and French Connection, launched its size inclusive brand Commonry in February and backed this up with a launch into kids' lifestyle and apparel with Allkinds in June. Both new brands launched with an eCommerce site and stores; Commonry with two stores and 19 DJs concessions and Allkinds with three stand-alone stores. "Brandbank

has always been at the forefront of great design, inspired by its Australian roots to produce collections of quality and longevity," Thomas said of the new brands.

### 16 Toni Maticevski Designer

Toni Maticevski's White Shirt design – combined with Celeste Barber's social might – saw Witchery sell out of the annual fundraising shirt in one week. This year was the first year in the campaign's 13-year history that Witchery collaborated with a designer on the shirt, the proceeds of which raise funds for the Ovarian Cancer Research Foundation. "It was a real honour to be able to contribute in my own way to this year's Witchery White Shirt Campaign," Maticevski said of the project. However, it wasn't just physical products Maticevski was lending his design hand to, he also designed an all-digital overcoat for Afterpay Australian Fashion Week. The pioneering project dubbed 'Digi\_Couture' allowed AAFW attendees to be digitally dressed and photographed wearing the 'Animator Overcoat.'

### 17 Edwina Forest/Adrian Norris Aje co-founders

While renowned for a curated mix of luxury essentials and statement occasion pieces, Aje couldn't resist the lure of activewear, launching Aje Athletica this year. Expanding into the \$2 billion women's activewear market, the brand recognised and responded to the demand for elevated leisure/activewear pieces. "In consideration of Aje's customer needs and lifestyles we couldn't overlook the growing desire for comfort and versatility, and a demand for performance-based athleticwear," Norris said. The brand has also furthered its sustainability mission with the range, creating the launch collection from 70% conscious materials. "With a respect



of our environment, Aje Athletica embraces sustainable practices and local expertise to deliver quality product with a minimal footprint," Forest said. "Informing the design process with 70% conscious fabrications from the ground up, impacting the foundations at elemental phase – was very fulfilling," she said.

## 18 Graham Munro Munro Footwear Group founder

Cracking 70 years in one industry is no mean feat. Growing a footwear business from nothing to a \$300 million empire is just another notch in Graham Munro's belt. The founder of footwear giant Munro Footwear Group, Munro saw the business grow from its manufacturing days through to its current retail, eCommerce and wholesale operation. And while the premise of creating an Australian footwear success may seem complex, Munro is driven by a simple principle. "It's all about the people, your team and your customers. Don't focus on the past, and don't focus on what can't be done," he said.



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## 19 Matthew Keighran SEAPAC MD Hugo Boss

The transition from luxury suiting and events dressing to casual and streetwear styles is one many luxury brands have experienced during the pandemic. However, Hugo Boss SEAPAC MD Matthew Keighran knew this change was coming before the pandemic took hold. Prior to 2020, the brand had already been introducing more casual styles to its range, however this came to a head last year, with the launch of the Boss x Russel Athletic collaboration. "The Russell Athletic launch event

was a world first for Boss," Keighran said. "The show format was a new concept that also aligned with the younger demographic the collection targeted and is representative of the way our industry has adapted its creative vision during the global pandemic," he said.

## 20 Sarah Magusara TikTok star

She is Australia's second-most followed TikTok star with 16.6 million followers. As fashion brands woke up to the power of TikTok advertising in 2020, Magusara and other Aussie TikTokers were able to capitalise on the hype. In the last year alone, Magusara has partnered with brands including The Athlete's Foot, Boohoo, Superdry, Fashion Nova, Beginning Boutique and JW PEI. Magusara's two recent videos for The Athlete's Foot clocked up 920,000 views and 90,000 likes combined.

## 21 Paul Tinkler Lululemon ANZ VP

Paul Tinkler is on a mission to grow the local connection to Lululemon – especially with Australia's men. In the past 18 months, the brand has signed a new ambassador – Melbourne Football Club captain Max Gawn – and has teamed up with men's health charity Movember for three years. "Like all of our ambassadors, Max embodies our brand values and is already creating impact in the community, so we are excited to support him in this, bring his story to life and inspire others along the way," Tinkler said of Gawn's appointment. Additionally, the brand has firmed its commitment to bricks-and-mortar retail in Australia, having opened its largest and first multi-level store in July, at Brookfield Place in Sydney.

## 22 Graham Dean Harris Scarfe CEO

Since acquisition by Spotlight in early 2020, Harris Scarfe has been on a transformation journey. Under Graham Dean's leadership, the business has diversified its fashion offering, introducing new designer collaborations with Jayson Brunson, Giaan Rooney and Leona Edmiston to elevate its range. Additionally, Harris Scarfe re-entered the Sydney market this year, with the opening of a new Rockdale store in



March. "Harris Scarfe offers a balance of well-known brands and exclusive designers and delivers great value and we were pleased to bring this back to our loyal Sydney customers," Dean said.

## 23 Sarah Rovis Mimco MD

Mimco reached two milestones in 2021 – the first being its 25th anniversary and the second, reaching \$1 million in donations to violence prevention organisation, Our Watch. To celebrate its 25th anniversary, the brand released a limited-edition capsule collection which took a trip down memory lane into the archives to bring some of Australia's favourite designs back. Meanwhile, to further its long-term partnership with Our Watch and to continue raising funds, Mimco donated 100% of its profits from sales on International Women's Day to the organisation. "Thanks to our community's generous support, our donations have been able to fund research, projects and campaigns that advocate for cultural and behavioural changes that can help end violence against women," Rovis said.

## 24 Jessie Sadler Christina Stephens founder and CEO

Jessie Sadler has made it her mission to create inclusive clothing, after witnessing the difficulties her mum had dressing herself after a fall. Making clothing for the 20% of the Australian population with a disability, Sadler's brand Christina Stephens has gone from strength to strength in its first year. Founded in March 2020, the brand has since launched on Australian adaptive fashion eTailer Every Human and in The Iconic's Adaptive Edit, has featured on the runway at Brisbane Fashion Month and London Fashion Week, has put community casting calls out for disabled models and has lobbied the Australian fashion industry to feature disabled models in

their campaigns and to create clothing for them. "Gone are the days where adaptive clothing is almost exclusively catering for the elderly," Sadler said. "We're seeing a lot more modern, edgier retailers and brands entering the space, which is great to see... now we just need to get Myer and David Jones on board," she said.

## 25 Ryan Edelmuth Stylerunner GM

Taking the reins of an established brand after acquisition comes with its challenges. There's the customer expectations, the business KPIs and demands for success as well as navigating the transition and team adjustments. However, Stylerunner GM Ryan Edelmuth has taken it in his stride. Since being under his – and the wider Accent Group's – leadership, Stylerunner has seen the opening of its first-ever bricks-and-mortar stores, the launch of vertical brand Stylerunner the Label and the launch of a new loyalty program. Edelmuth revealed at *Ragtrader Live* that by the end of the year, Stylerunner will have opened several new stores. Meanwhile its vertical label is making up about 20% of sales and the brand is signing up 80% of its in-store customers to its database. A successful takeover I'd say.

## 26 Ashley Reade Nike Pacific VP and GM

Nike hasn't wasted time making use of the heightened focus on sport over the past 18 months. Led by Ashley Reade, the brand has signed major partnerships with Collingwood Football and Netball Clubs and Cricket Australia's Big Bash League to produce all on and off-field apparel for the teams. Additionally, the brand has used its partnership with Collingwood to further its Move to Zero mission toward zero carbon and zero waste, with the latest Collingwood playing guernsey made from a 90% recycled polyester fabric. "Nike and Collingwood both have a strong commitment to sport, and we envisage this partnership can help empower more women and the next generation of athletes to push the boundaries of sport," Reade said.

## 27 Alexandra Smart Ginger & Smart MD

Ginger & Smart entered 2021 with a refreshed outlook, aiming to make the brand more accessible to a wider audience. Recognising the shift to a casualised way of dressing, the luxury label introduced pieces beyond its 'core' of event dressing. "While dresses still drive 40% of our business, we've had to be a whole lot more relevant to the way our customer is dressing now and what she's looking to do in the future," Smart said. Additionally, the uptake of buy-now-pay-later (BNPL) payment options have also had a positive impact on the brand, making its luxury price more accessible to more consumers. "BNPL is a really important part of the business and I think as people transact more and more online, it's going to increase within our business model," she said.

## 28 Mark McInnes Premier Retail outgoing CEO

While Premier Investments' interactions with Myer may have been taking up headlines, the performance of Premier Retail throughout the pandemic is the real story. Under the leadership of Mark McInnes, the Group delivered a 70% increase in total global sales for the second half of FY21, compared to 2H20. "The strategic decision taken last year by the Chairman and I to build our supply chain and significantly invest in wanted inventory for Easter, April school holidays, Mother's Day and the winter season ensured we were in stock, delivering strong sales and gross margin growth across all our brands," McInnes said. Additionally, the Group expects its FY21 EBIT to lift 82% - 92% to \$340 million - \$360 million.

## 29 Gary Williams Rebel MD

Rebel's innovation in the toughest trading period in recent history is spearheaded by Gary Williams. The retailer sold five years-worth of treadmills in three weeks during the first lockdown. This result came from a combination of the right product at the right time and a doubling down on digital, which saw Rebel make the most of its three million-strong database through marketing communications and loyalty. Meanwhile, the business has also seen significant success from its Rebel rcx concept stores and has also revolutionised its online fulfilment capabilities.

## 30 Phil Ryan City Chic CEO and MD

City Chic Collective didn't let the pandemic get in the way of its international expansion objectives. Under Phil Ryan's leadership, the Australian curve retailer acquired yet another international curve business, Navabi. The German brand was bought by City Chic for \$9.6 million in cash, allowing City Chic to take its brands to Europe. Despite a depletion in the brand's stock due to pandemic demand, City Chic recognised the diamond in the rough, with the eTailer clocking \$16.6 million in sales revenue and 5.8 million website visits in 2020. Prior to the pandemic, annual traffic to the site exceeded 10 million visits. "Navabi is an exciting strategic opportunity, giving us a great foothold in the €40 billion European plus-size market," Ryan commented. ■



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