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The Power 30

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The Power 30

Assia Benmedjdoub reveals who made the list of influential fashion traders this year.

1 Solomon Lew Premier Investments chairman

As one of Australia's most influential retail power brokers, Solomon Lew has long featured in the Power 30 list. This year, he surges straight to number one. While businesses face unprecedented challenges in the wake of COVID-19, Lew's Premier Investments continues to defy the odds with a forecast record profit for the 2019/2020 financial year. Powered by strong eCommerce sales, JobKeeper subsidies and aggressive rental renegotiations, the owner of retail chains such as Peter Alexander and Portmans expects its full-year earnings before interest and tax (EBIT) to be between \$184.8 million and \$185.8 million, about an 11% increase on the prior year. An uplift in one of the most uncertain trading periods in recent memory? That's pole position.



front and centre. As winner of The Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Foundation's National Indigenous Fashion Design Award, Shaw was recognised for producing contemporary interpretations of Indigenous design. Her brand MAARA Collective also gives back to the community, bridging the gap between commerce and conscious creativity. As part of her prize, Shaw will receive mentorship and business support as well as a one year membership to the Australian Fashion Council.

2 Julie Shaw MAARA Collective founder

In a year where the fashion industry started to meaningfully address the question of diversity, Julie Shaw's creativity sat



3 Daniel Agostinelli Accent Group CEO

Accent Group CEO Daniel Agostinelli still remembers the day he had to shut 500 stores and stand down 5000 staff across Australia and New Zealand in late March. But as the COVID-19 pandemic forced retailers to lockdown globally, it wasn't long before Agostinelli and his team fired up their omnichannel armoury. Dark stores allowed the group's store-based inventory to fulfil online orders until stores re-opened. Online sales reached between \$800,000 and \$1.1 million per day in the last two weeks of April, compared to an average of \$250,000 prior to the shutdown. "It was a seismic shift and it continues today, which is the new concern

for all retailers moving forward, about how many bricks and mortar stores do we need given the shift to online," he says.

4 Elle Roseby Country Road MD

Australia has not endured the easiest year on record, commencing with a devastating bushfire season and the current coronavirus pandemic. For Country Road, a brand steeped in sustainability and ethics metrics, it was a time to reconsider its community values and messaging. Elle Roseby took the powerful step of moving from corporate sponsorships such as The Australian Open to support Indigenous programs and initiatives. This was further amplified in Country Road's spring campaign Regeneration, which spotlighted communities in the aftermath of Australia's bushfires.



5 Edwina McCann Vogue editor-in-chief

Edwina McCann has been the editor-in-chief of Vogue Australia since 2012 and is responsible for the Vogue brand across print, digital and social media platforms. As consumer fashion magazines consolidate in Australia, McCann has continued to maintain relevance through online and offline activations including Vogue Fashion's Night Out and Vogue Fashion Relief. It comes as Bauer Media Australia,

the country's biggest magazine publisher, announced it will close eight of its brands – including Elle, Harper's Bazaar and InStyle cementing Vogue Australia as an unrivalled voice in fashion.

6 Carolyn Mackenzie Forever New MD

As managing director of Forever New, Carolyn Mackenzie has forged ahead with sustainability and international expansion plans despite COVID-19. "We're on a long-term journey to improve our sustainable footprint and we're looking forward to revealing more of what that looks like this year," she says. "We will be continuing to expand our international presence and we're excited to be able to offer Forever New's designs to more people in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East," she says. The womenswear retailer also quickly responded to customers in lockdown, launching a courier service to collect returns from home in April.

7 Justin Levis Cue Clothing Co. director

This year, family-owned Cue Clothing Co. harnessed its onshore manufacturing network for a valuable cause: creating PPE for workers at St Vincent's Hospital. In a bid to continue supporting its local makers during COVID-19 lockdowns, it consolidated orders instead of crippling vendors through cancellations. Where it produced 10,000 garments a month for select ranges, it would reduce these to 3,000 in order to ensure cashflow. "One of the advantages of local production is flexibility and agility to support smaller runs," Justin Levis says. "We know this affects our entire supply chain and we need to support factories with cashflow so they can survive this." In addition to supply chain flexibility, the retailer has maximised digital channels through cross-border trade and video styling sessions for consumers.

8 Ravi Thakran L Catterton Asia chairman

Private equity has come under intense scrutiny this year, following the demise of several PE-backed fashion retailers including Seafolly, The PAS Group, Colette by Colette Hayman and Tigerlily. While debate rages around the large debt burden attributed to PE acquisitions, one thing is clear: these players hold power. This was no clearer than after the collapse



of L Catterton-backed Seafolly this year; not only did the swimwear giant return to its owners, but L Catterton bought out its competitor Jets in the process. "I'd say the case for private equity is even stronger because in times like this having private capital available is certainly of great advantage to the industry," Ravi Thakran told the AFR.

9 Camilla Freeman-Topper Camilla & Marc co-founder

It didn't take long for Australian designer brand Camilla & Marc to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. By April, the brand had launched a new digital portal featuring virtual consultations, styling and live streaming sessions. "At a time when the world is in lockdown, creating highly relevant and meaningful communications powered by innovation is absolutely key," Camilla Freeman-Topper says. This was soon followed by a revamped C&M Sport line, aimed at providing consumers with fashion forward basics and loungewear styles. The line included oversized hoodies in brushed fleece and knitted bodysuits – a complement to its tailored and occasion wear collections.

10 Matt Jensen M.J. Bale founder

In an Australian menswear first, M.J. Bale is set to be 100% carbon neutral by the end of 2021. The 11-year-old menswear brand, which operates over 50 stores across Australia, is working on a series of emission reduction strategies to reduce its carbon footprint. Scientist Andrew Moore of Life Cycle Logic has begun a formal carbon footprint assessment of the entire organisation, including M.J. Bale's extended ecosystem of partners and suppliers. The assessment will be completed in early 2021, then independently audited. Matt Jensen takes out a Power 30 position for his unwavering commitment to

sustainability. "As an Australian-owned brand we enjoy certain privileges of the land and environment. But these privileges carry responsibilities. We recognise that future generations of Australians will inherit the decisions we make today."

11 Dominique Lamb National Retailers Association CEO

It's no secret retail has been one of the hardest hit categories during COVID-19, as lockdowns force retailers to re-engineer their business. In amidst the structural changes, Dominique Lamb has emerged as a true leader who understands the implications for workplaces and communities. This year, the National Retail Association (NRA) joined forces with the Palaszczuk Government to launch a Domestic Violence Retailer Support Program. The initiative assists small to medium businesses in addressing domestic and family violence. "The retail industry has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, but it doesn't stop us caring about the welfare of our team members. In fact, the need for additional resources and support is even more critical, with evidence of domestic and family violence reports increasing due to isolation," she says.



12 Vanessa Brennan Michael Hill chief brand and strategy officer

When it comes to the jewellery category, in-store fittings have long been considered critical to customer satisfaction. Michael Hill rose to the challenge of social distancing in 2020 with a range of digital offerings, including its 'Virtual Ring Try-On' feature and 'Virtual Personal Jewellery' appointments. Some 22,000 customers

utilised the former, while virtual appointments gave users access to expert advisors in multiple language options including Mandarin and Hindi. For Vanessa Brennan, these touchpoints will be essential moving forward. "We're always looking for unique and exciting ways to engage and connect with our Michael Hill community. Choosing jewellery is so personal and we want to provide the highest quality customer service at every touchpoint – whether it be digitally or in-store."

13 Ian Bailey Kmart Australia MD

Discount department store Kmart weathered a surge of demand in 2020, as customers stocked up on homewares and basics in lockdown. In fact, it was forced to launch a virtual queue to access its website in April, after customers crashed the site with coronavirus shopping. This was soon met with a series of innovative strategies from Ian Bailey, including the launch of dark stores to the rollout of its first K hub sites in regional Victoria. Approximately 92 Target stores will be converted in K hub stores, which mirror smaller neighbourhood sites aimed at convenience and community.

14 Pip Edwards P.E Nation co-founder

You know you've made it when one of the biggest retailers in the world comes knocking. That's what happened



this year when H&M reached out to Australian activewear brand P.E Nation for its latest designer collaboration range. Launched worldwide on March 5, the collection was not only an Australian-first but a landmark moment in sustainability. It included 30 pieces with sustainability credentials such as organic fibres and fabrics. With P.E Nation's annual revenue in excess of \$20 million, the brand partnership elevated its footprint globally. "You can't get more global than this," Edwards says.

15 Lisa Rogers Cotton On Kids GM

In 2005, Cotton On Group opened its first kidswear store in Knox, Australia. Fast forward to its 15th anniversary this year, and Cotton On Kids is available in 19 countries and has created landmark changes through its support of Cotton On Foundation. Through its customers, it has sold 2.5 million bottles of water and 4.5 million tote bags to support education programs across 24 schools in South Africa, Thailand and Australia. Fresh to the role of GM, Rogers is no stranger to building success within the Group. Since joining the business, she has held multiple roles including national brand manager and national retail manager, as well as brand-specific positions at Cotton On and Rubi.

16 Madeline George Boohoo country manager

Having a dedicated country manager has proved vital for Boohoo, with its Australian arm successfully pivoting to cater for consumers working remotely. Country manager Madeline George said the eCommerce giant has seen a 94% spike in loungewear sales and 130% increase in athleisure year on year, with influencer strategies geared to promoting home life. "Usually at this time of year we'd be pushing festival and new season, however with the current circumstances we've had to flip our trading on its head and think about what the customer is looking for right now," she says. "We are very fortunate in that these categories are always on for us, so we had the stock there ready to go, it was just about re-shooting this for our homepage and then utilising our influencer network (globally) to get this seeded out. It's amazing how quickly you can adapt and move when needed."



17 Kim Kidd Honey Birdette CEO

Newly appointed Honey Birdette CEO Kim Kidd has wasted no time in revealing her vision for the intimate apparel retailer – the world's the limit. Following on from a boom in eCommerce sales during COVID-19, Kidd is powering through an omnichannel vision for 2020/21. "Before COVID, our business is probably split about 40% digital sales 60% retail. Since COVID it's been a bit more 60/40 split even when retail reopened. We know that reaching more people is going to be possible through digital and we know that's where our focus and our strategy is going to lie. We have a digital-only team that we're building up now so it'll be about reaching new markets, having relevant marketing and content and really trying to get Honey Birdette known more worldwide."

18 Nigel Chadwick Myer CFO

While Myer hasn't had the easiest year, Nigel Chadwick achieved a remarkable feat for the department store. Breathing room from lenders – and potentially even a small net cash win this year. Due to the significant impact of COVID-19 during the second half of the fiscal year, lenders agreed to wave covenant testing at the end of FY2020. Myer also signed a binding term sheet with its existing lenders to amend and extend its bank facility until August 2022. "Securing this new facility with our existing lenders is testament to the work that we have undertaken during the past two years," he says. "It is particularly pleasing to have secured this extension to our facilities during such an unprecedented time of economic and social disruption in retail."

19 Marilena Madlener Scanlan Theodore production manager

It's one of the most luxurious brands in Australian fashion but as this year proved, Scanlan Theodore is also one of the most agile and community-minded. The designer womenswear brand repurposed its Fiji factories amid the COVID-19 pandemic, using its facilities to create urgently required personal protective equipment. Marilena Madlener has been integral to the brand's production power, a key leader in establishing its Fiji manufacturing plant to ensure quality and efficiency. Her strengths extend to supply chain management, having reduced company costs across all raw materials by 50% through sourcing and cross costing against new suppliers.



20 Guy Russo Scentre Group board member

He was revered as the "Kmart turnaround king", responsible for leading the Wesfarmers' owned department store to become one of the largest and most profitable in Australia. He's back in the fashion retail game with a recent appointment to the Scentre Group board. Scentre Group chairman Brian Schwartz AM describes him as a vital component to its succession planning. "Guy will add significant skills and experience to the Board as a business leader who understands the customer, retail and retail property."

21 Leila Naja Hibri Australian Fashion Council CEO

The Australian Fashion Council has been a tireless gatekeeper to the industry this year, releasing several initiatives to help it survive COVID-19. This includes a series

of education programs, industry partnerships and an extensive industry survey targeting C-Suite executives. The survey found the apparel and fashion industry in crisis mode, with 75-80% of companies agreeing or strongly agreeing to being negatively impacted by COVID-19. CEO Leila Naja Hibri used the findings to develop a recovery blueprint. "The immediate and unprecedented impact of this crisis has been immensely impactful on our industry and a large ecosystem that it sustains," she says. "The silver lining is that we are being forced to rethink the way we do things; from sourcing and manufacturing to selling and consuming."

22 Debra Wittner Wittner founder

When it comes to making a greener impact in fashion footwear retailing, Debra Wittner is top of mind. Wittner has made packaging and product development a key part of the brand's sustainability journey, with a series of back-end and consumer facing initiatives. With the product journey, Wittner has joined the Leather Working Group and explored materials made from recyclable bottles. In the packaging, it is banning and phasing out all plastics with the introduction of a new Eco-Shoobox. "Our commitment to the environment reaches beyond the realm of manufacturing and production. Being sustainable means we must cultivate a work environment and brand ethos centred on good environmental practices."

23 Ryan Gracie Catch CMO

As Melbourne entered into its second lockdown this year, retailers and eCommerce businesses had their plans thrown astray. That didn't stop Ryan Gracie from launching Catch's biggest campaign to date. The entire process from pitch to post-production was done via video conferencing with



the Catch team collaborating with the external creative team remotely. The campaign was shot in Queensland while the agency's creative team and Catch, both based in Melbourne, provided real-time feedback to the live footage for three full days. "Like the rest of society, COVID has presented its fair share of challenges," Gracie says. "It has created an environment where everything changes rapidly from day to day and we never know what will be coming next. It has forced us to be flexible in our approach across many different areas."

24 Alex Perry Designer

Australian fashion designer Alex Perry knows the power of being fashionably early. As COVID-19 upended the luxury apparel industry, he was quick to announce immediate changes to production and delivery schedules in collaboration with key clients. Perry reduced the number of seasons and changed the timing of 2020 collection drops, adding exclusive capsule collections with key partners to support top-line sales. "As our whole industry works tirelessly to react to this ever-changing global crisis, I have been very encouraged by many of our recent partner conversations and the level of transparency, collaboration and quick thinking in response to the challenges we collectively face," he says.

25 Richard Facioni

Alceon Group executive director

When it comes to fashion retail industry investors, it doesn't get bigger than Richard Facioni. Facioni is the executive director at Alceon Group, which invests in a wide portfolio of businesses including Lego, SurfStitch, Ginger & Smart, Noni B and EziBuy. Always on the hunt for the next acquisition, Facioni believes in a simple investment thesis comprising of three points. If the brand is viable, he and his team can deliver improved sourcing, streamlined cost-of-doing-business and competitive structuring around overheads. "There's no question that all the hard work we've done in creating highly efficient businesses has helped us weather this year."

26 Lee Munro

Munro Footwear Group chief experience officer

What's the benefit of working for a family business? Enjoying long-held partnerships with suppliers – an essential



tool for weathering the unexpected challenges presented in 2020. As one of Australia's largest footwear empires, Munro Footwear Group has worked hand-in-hand with production partners to navigate inventory hurdles. "I think our suppliers in general have been wonderful," Munro says. "We've had a lot of support from suppliers in terms of deferring product or payment terms or shifting production later, even cancelling some orders, so we've built our supply side relationships over many years and that's really held us in good stead."

27 Michael Gazal

Former PVH Australia chairman

It's one of the most powerful apparel groups in the world, with Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger in its stable. As Australia endured the brutal bushfire season at the start of 2020, PVH Corp was also a contributor to the Australian bushfire relief efforts. It was all thanks to the PVH Australia chairman at the time Michael Gazal, who was also instrumental in building its brands in Australia through Gazal Group. Gazal had a 50/50 joint venture with PVH called PVH Brands Australia – which wholesaled the Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein, Van Heusen, Pierre Cardin, Trent Nathan and Fred Bracks brands. Last year, PVH acquired the Australian business after successful management by the Gazal family.

28 Shona Joy

Designer

"This year, we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Shona Joy brand – though not quite in the way we had imagined."

Those were the words of Shona Joy, as she sent a heartfelt message to the industry reflecting on the hardship and silver linings thrown up by COVID-19. In the space of three painful days, the womenswear brand had millions of dollars' worth of orders cancelled by some of its biggest retail partners. But Joy bounced back, offering loyal stockists a range of marketing and discounting support as well as unleashing a wave of new product pivots. This included its first ever capsule line of elevated sweats and branded tees, with a portion of proceeds donated to Women Sport Australia.

29 Rozalia Russian

Digital entrepreneur

She's one of Australia's most prolific fashion influencers – but entrepreneur is a more apt description of Rozalia Russian. Her collaborations with the fashion industry are strategic and well-planned, culminating in a disruptive fashion launch during COVID-19. Despite falls in discretionary spending, her capsule collection for Atoir sold out on its official site in less than 20 minutes. The line, also available on Myer and Stylerunner, was a pitch perfect range of tonal sweats, trenches and tanks for consumers in lockdown. What was initially intended as a line of suiting and dresses was quickly updated to meet market conditions. "In about five weeks, I redesigned the entire collection," she says, delivering an immediate hit for consumers seeking trend-driven loungewear.

30 Justin Hillberg

SurfStitch MD

Justin Hillberg understands the power of personalisation, forging ahead with a range of CX activations during COVID-19. This includes the launch of a new app, engaging with customers on a highly segmented basis as mobile shopping continues to deliver sales growth for the fashion site. "Despite the COVID-19 outbreak, we thought it was essential to continue to prioritise our plans to engage shoppers through this additional channel. This pandemic has been a catalyst for mobile shopping, making an app all the more important for us." SurfStitch offers consumers over 300 brands across men's, women's and kids fashion. It was the first and only Australian retailer to offer early access to HUF x Pulp Fiction this year, as part of a strategy to secure exclusive lines. ■



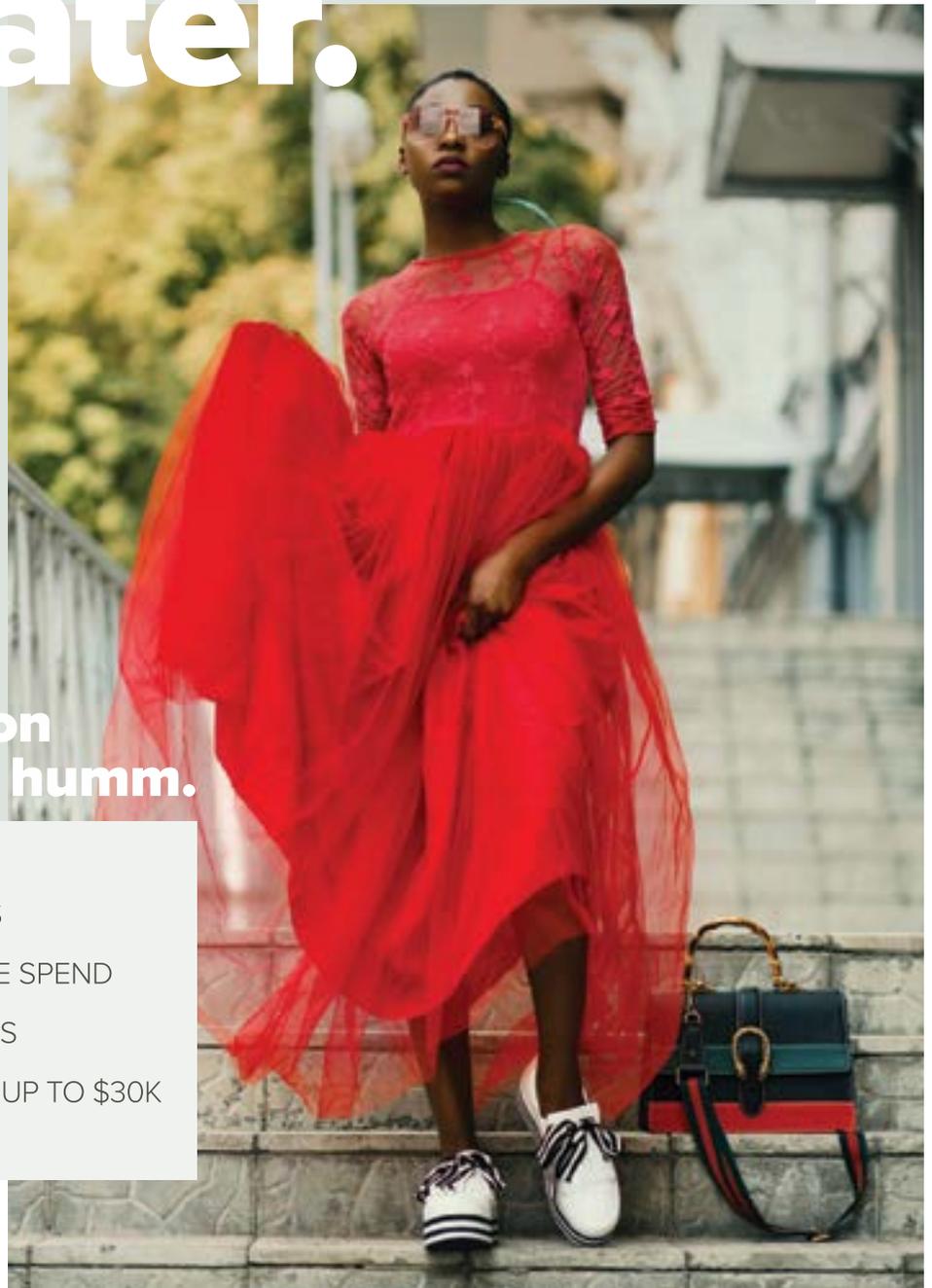


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