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FEB 21, 2018 3:25PM EST

Why the Chief Experience Officer Is Retail's New Change Agent

By Samantha McDonald



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Behold retail's new turnaround agent: The chief experience officer.

About a week ago, [J.Crew](#) made headlines when it announced the hiring of longtime Starbucks executive Adam Brotman, who's widely credited with revamping the coffee giant's digital businesses, including launching the mobile ordering system and introducing its loyalty program. Come March, the former EVP will enter the specialty retailer's network as its president and chief experience officer, a newly created role that places him second-in-command to CEO Jim Brett.

Within the past decade, as consumer shifts have increasingly led businesses to improve their in-store experiences, the CXO position has grown in popularity. And it certainly introduces a new type of executive in the boardroom — one whose primary responsibility includes curating a holistic, engaging and more personalized experience for customers that previously would have fallen under the scope of the chief marketing officer. However, some companies have come to necessitate a new role altogether, with the CXO's tasks ranging from hosting in-store events and visualizing new products or services to ensuring that customers have a positive interaction at every step of the purchasing process.

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"Consumer attention span is limited, and people tend to go with the best value, content [and] experience," B. Riley FBR senior retail analyst Jeff Van Sinderen told FN. "I think we are going to see more nontraditional C-suite roles embraced by brands as they evolve all of their customer touch points in the ever-morphing, omnichannel, digital world in which we live."

Within the past three years, Foot Locker, Vineyard Vines and Bonobos are among the fashion firms to have employed a chief experience officer to create innovative brand strategies as well as provide integrated channels that allow for interactive encounters with customers. For instance, CXO Dominique Essig has helped Bonobos optimize its dozens of Guidesshops, a service launched in 2011 through which retail associates provide complimentary one-on-one style assistance to customers, by creating an in-store platform that fosters better cohesion between Bonobos' physical and online channels. The technology has helped the brand manage customers' shopping experience from searching the catalog and checking out for delivery to managing returns or exchanges — creating an ease that today's shoppers have come to expect.

To the modern-day company, the CXO would not only be able to identify customer expectations and assess opportunities, but also effectively respond to their changing needs — particularly among today's younger shoppers — to deliver a total brand experience.

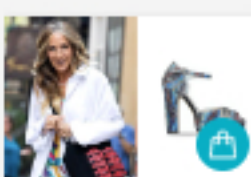
"Given all of the choices that consumers have today, all brands and retailers need to be focused on the experience that their consumers have with their brand or store," Beth Goldstein, an industry analyst for fashion, footwear and accessories at The NPD Group Inc., told FN. "If their experience isn't good, they'll go elsewhere and they'll write bad reviews and share on social media, which can be hard to control. Younger consumers want more engagement with the brands they buy and the retailers at which they shop, so there's more of a need for this role today."

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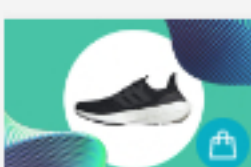
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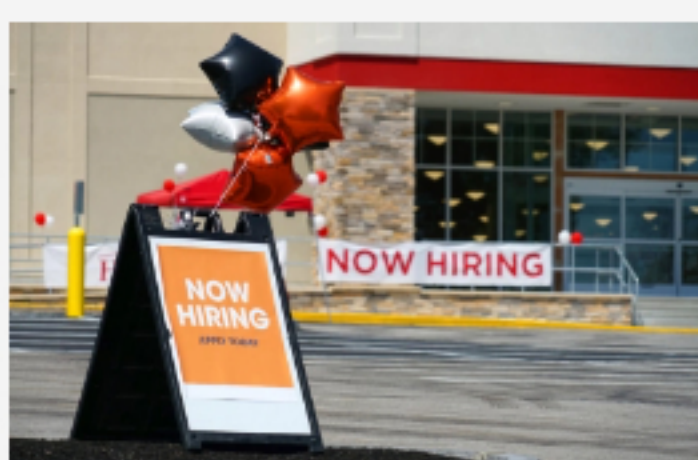
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