



FN CEO Summit Takes on Hot Topics Reshaping the Industry

By FN Staff

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Big names. Bold strategies. Burning issues. Anticipation is building for the 2019 FN CEO Summit, set for May 5-7 at the Miami Beach Edition. The powerful speaker lineup includes some of the industry's top CEOs, prolific design talents and expert brand builders.

This year's event will focus on hot topics that are dramatically reshaping the industry conversation, including sustainability and diversity.

Over the past year, as the #MeToo movement has cast new light on the need for greater levels of diversity across a range of professional industries, some of footwear's key leaders have revealed heightened objectives around all types of inclusion.

Diane Sullivan, CEO, president and chairman of Caleres Inc., has been cultivating female talent in her executive ranks and on the company's board, of which more than half of its members are women. At the summit, Sullivan will take the stage with two of them — Carla Hendra, CEO of Ogilvy Consulting, and Wenda Harris Millard, vice chairman of MediaLink. "A diverse board means diverse perspectives, experiences and approaches, and it just makes good business sense," Sullivan said.

Gender equality is just one part of the overall equation. In the wake of a wave of marketing missteps at brands like Gucci and Prada, it has become clear that the next big diversity conquest centers on racial and ethnic inclusion.

Racial diversity helps footwear companies bolster consumer relevance, foster feelings of belonging among internal stakeholders and prevent tone-deaf marketing. With an uptick in media coverage and public discourse on the subject, most brands are aware of the need for inclusion as well as the potential benefits. However, putting meaningful action behind that idea can pose significant challenges.



In a panel focused on bridging the gap between awareness and action, Shawn Outler, Macy's chief diversity officer, will outline the new policies and initiatives the department store is implementing around inclusion and discuss why racial diversity is a critical focus. Melanie Boulden, Reebok's global head of marketing and brand management, will break down how her unique background as a former executive at Crayola prepared her to bring new knowledge and experience to Reebok, as well as reinvigorate its marketing to more authentically connect with minorities.

Actress and author Tami Roman will dive into the hurdles of entering footwear as an outsider, her best advice for minorities looking to break in and what she believes major brands can do to improve outreach. Kyle Rudy, SVP at executive placement firm Kirk Palmer Associates, will tackle best practices for recruiting ethnic minority talent and how companies can better foster belonging among employees at all levels.

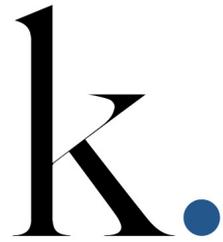
Dave Powers, president and CEO of Deckers, has put diversity at the top of his agenda, and the executive will reveal why the issue is so important to him and his company. On the sustainability front, Allbirds — one of the fastest-rising shoe stars — leads the way with its eco-focused business model. The brand's co-founder, Joey Zwillinger, will tell the summit crowd how the brand turned simple wool sneakers into a coveted style worn by men, women and children alike. Another label to watch is Tapestry-owned Coach, which is undergoing a transformation under president and CEO Josh Schulman, who will speak about cause-related marketing.

Gianvito Rossi, the namesake at the center of one of the luxury industry's biggest success stories, will talk about the evolution of his company — a celebrity favorite — and growing up in one of Italy's most famous shoe families. "I had the chance to have a long experience with my father [Sergio Rossi]. It helped me [avoid making] some mistakes," Rossi told FN a few years ago.

Blake Krueger is also a proven brand builder. The chairman, CEO and president of Wolverine World Wide Inc. will address the importance of speed and evolution at his company, which owns Keds, Merrell, Sperry and Saucony.

Three talented retail leaders will also take the stage to discuss the fast-moving landscape and how they are adapting to keep up with consumers. Debbie Ferrée, vice chairman and president of Designer Brands, will talk about the company's recent rebranding and ambitious plans for the future.

Jeff Espersen, chief merchandising officer of Zappos.com, will discuss the e-tailer's 20th anniversary and its next chapter.



This year's sponsor speakers include Greg Petro, CEO of First Insight; Jose Suarez, founder and CEO of Impactiva; and Matthew Suraci, Klarna's head of commercial for North America. Matt Priest, president and CEO of FDRA, will also sit down with Shoe Carnival President and CEO Cliff Sifford for a conversation.