



At Your Service: The Helping Hands in Fashion

By Kathryn Hopkins and Evan Clark with contributions from Sindhu Sundar

August 23, 2019

No one can do it alone — here's a look at some of the many business service providers that make the industry work.

From tariffs and trademarks to restructuring and finding the right leader — the living ain't always easy in fashion.

It's a complex, fast-moving consumer world and there are lots of big decisions (and lots of little ones that make big differences) and they need to be made all the time.

Aside from the boot-strapped start-up where every issue is an all-hands-on-deck situation, companies in fashion, retail and beauty try to focus on what they're really good at — often its brand building and marketing — while bringing in help for the other issues.

Even active companies don't always have the experience they need in certain areas. A very acquisitive player might buy a few companies a year, but consultants and accountants who specialize in specific areas could see scores of deals over the same time frame and know the nuances of the ever-changing regulatory and financing landscapes.

“By assisting with many transactions, we know exactly what the pitfalls are that the company might not know about,” said Natalie Kotlyar, retail practice leader for BDO, which helps companies on many fronts. “We do it so often, we know exactly what we're looking for.”

While there are lots of companies and lots of advisers, the fixes aren't cookie-cutter and not every brand has the same needs.

Kotlyar said, “The difference is all about knowing and understanding your client base and being able to work with them and provide them with solutions to some of today's most sensitive issues.”

She pointed to tariffs and trade as two of the most important topics today — and little wonder with the U.S.-China trade war reshaping supply chains by the minute.

Cyber security and e-commerce tax issues are also top of mind.

Clearly the world is changing and sometimes it's the people who dive deepest into the details who really understand the depth of the industry's transformation.

The buttoned-up image of the accountant poring over spreadsheets and counting every nickel belies the hidden drama of the trends they're living and breathing.

"I think it's very exciting," Kotlyar said. "We're very passionate about our jobs and whether that includes advisory, accounting, or M&A, you're always seeing and meeting interesting companies and intriguing people and helping our clients thrive."

But perhaps the most important help companies get is in finding a leader. In executive search....

The Recruitment Specialists

Floriane De Saint-Pierre & Associés

Having founded her eponymous firm nearly three decades ago, Paris-based Floriane De Saint-Pierre has cemented a reputation as European fashion's go-to headhunter when searching for a design chief. She was responsible for placing Christopher Bailey at Burberry, Christophe Lemaire at Lacoste and Alber Elbaz at Lanvin to name just a few designer-brand partnerships she has cultivated in her time.

Agent Secret

Another Paris-based recruitment firm, Agent Secret, is the brainchild of Agnès Barret. The firm, which has a team of five, specializes in recruiting creative talents by providing a bridge between designers and managers, based on Barret's experience of working as collections director alongside Marc Jacobs at Louis Vuitton and Stella McCartney at Chloé. To date, it has mainly focused on creative appointments, but recently hired Jean Vignerot, who will expand the firm's remit to recruit new emerging jobs in fashion such as chief experience officer.

Martens & Heads

With offices in New York and Paris, boutique executive search firm Martens & Heads works across the fashion, luxury, retail and beauty industries. In luxury recruitment, around 20 percent of their work revolves around hiring for creative roles, according to Mary Gallagher, a European associate at Martens & Heads. The rest of their time is devoted to business roles.

Kristy Hurt Consulting

After cutting her teeth in LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton's human resources department in the U.S., Kristy Hurt took the plunge and set up her own New York-based recruitment consultancy about a decade ago. Focusing on fashion and beauty, she recruits for a wide range of jobs, from the c-suite to design to digital marketing to merchandise to human resources and many more. "Currently, as an example, I'm working on several design roles for a ready-to-wear brand," she told WWD. Her clients include Alexander Wang, Miu Miu and Fendi.

Herbert Mines Associates

New York-based Herbert Mines Associates is one of the go-to companies when the industry launches a ceo search. It has placed senior-level executives at Barneys New York, Neiman Marcus, Liz Claiborne, Gap Inc. and Yurman Designs, among others. Herbert Mines competes against rivals such as Spencer Stuart and Korn Ferry International by offering a high level of service along with deep, industry-related knowledge.

Kirk Palmer Associates

Also firmly on the corporate hiring side is the 30-plus-year-old Kirk Palmer Associates, which serves the retail, consumer-wholesale and fashion industries. In addition to New York and London, KPA has an office in San Francisco and employs around 30 people in the firm. It lists Calvin Klein, Celine, Estée Lauder, Intermix, Macy's, Marc Jacobs and Neiman Marcus among its many clients. The firm specializes in recruiting board, chief executive officer, president and c-suite level positions.

The Lawyers

Nixon Peabody

Nixon Peabody's fashion law practice and its attorneys advise fashion clients on regulation, contracts and licensing and will also defend them in litigation. Its clients include Armani and H&M. "We can be used a lot, or used a little, depending on the needs of our clients," said Staci Riordan, who leads the firm's fashion practice. "Just because we're a big firm, clients don't need to use us hours and hours a week, although, I certainly don't mind."

Katten Muchin Rosenman

The firm advises fashion companies on intellectual property issues, including new marks and designs, and helps them manage their IP portfolio, and enforces and monitors their trademarks. It also advises clients on litigation as well as contracts including licensing, distribution, and endorsement agreements. Its clients include Kenneth Cole, Calvin Klein, Marc Jacobs and Aeropostale. "We are fully immersed with our clients on everything IP," said Karen Artz Ash, national co-chair of the firm's intellectual property department.

Dentons

For decades, Dentons has advised luxury fashion companies in a range of transactional, litigation and regulatory issues. The company advises clients on issues including deals, real estate, tax issues, data privacy, and labor and employment matters.

Steptoe & Johnson

The firm represents large fashion brands, including Louis Vuitton, as well as small start-ups and jewelry brands, advising them about trademarks and counterfeiting and representing them in litigation. "We do enforce the trademarks pre-litigation, where we reach a resolution with a counterfeiter or infringer," said Michael Allan, partner at the firm. "But the biggest part of our practice is litigation."

Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan

The litigation-only firm has represented fashion brands including UGG parent Deckers Outdoor Corp., Gucci America and Coach in intellectual property disputes. This year, it was also one of the firms that represented a group of more than 200 companies, including top fashion brands, in an amicus brief to the U.S. Supreme Court arguing that federal civil rights protections should extend to LGBTQ employees.

The Consultants

A.T. Kearney

Advising clients across fashion, retail and beauty, A.T. Kearney has over 500 consultants supporting companies as they look to improve their entire business — from branding to supply chain, manufacturing to retail, product development to innovation and all aspects of digital transformation. The consultancy said it works to "enable clients to exceed the needs of current and future consumers, across multiple geographies and an evolving distribution landscape."

AlixPartners

As retailers face everything from digital native challengers to their own engrained processes, AlixPartners draws from the real-world expertise of its consultants and its own retail analytics platform to drive change. "We bring small teams of senior professionals with deep industry experience both in consulting and from having served in senior roles at leading retailers and brands," the firm said.

Accenture

Accenture pitches itself as working “at the intersection of business and technology” and, in retail especially, it seeks to “use innovation to reimagine offerings and create an integrated web of services that gives customers the products and experiences they want, when they want them.” The focus areas include finding the most loyal and profitable customers, predicting what products are most likely to be returned and how analytics can boost merchandise and supply chain efficiency.

EY

The multifaceted EY has over 44,000 professionals focusing the global consumer products sector — including consultants and specialists in assurance, tax and dealmaking. As complexity increases, costs rise and demand shifts to new markets, EY steps in with solutions on multiple fronts. “To succeed, companies now need to be leaner and more agile, with a relentless focus on execution,” according to EY.

McKinsey & Company

McKinsey’s fashion practice has about 100 partners and senior experts, who have worked on more than 900 projects in the area over the past five years, helping top companies in every major sector. It has a dedicated research team and churns out intelligence on everything from “The State of Fashion” to the “Go-to-Market Process Survey.”

The Accountants

PwC

PwC helps keeps the books balanced at for high-growth tech start-ups, retailers, food manufacturers, airlines, hotels and more. The company said it sees both the challenges and the opportunities in “addressing change at the convergence of powerful industries is where we thrive.”

RSM

With nearly 11,000 professionals across 87 offices, RSM is ready to engage. The company describes its purpose as delivering “the power of being understood to our clients, colleagues and communities through world-class audit, tax and consulting services focused on middle-market businesses.”

Grant Thornton

Count Grant Thornton as the accountant looking to shake things up to help businesses be ready for what’s to come. With 60 U.S. offices, the firm provides tax, audit and advisory services. Grant Thornton said it offers “personalized attention to help organizations challenge the status quo and move confidently into the future.”

KPMG

KPMG aids consumer and retail companies of all shapes and sizes navigate some tricky waters “from rapid technology change and digital disruption, empowered consumers, rising costs, increased speed to market, and significant shifts in brand loyalty and purchasing behavior.”

BDO

BDO’s retail practice includes hundreds of professionals, including accounting and advisory specialists focusing on department stores, apparel, footwear and accessories and other kinds of companies. Lately, the firm’s been stepping in with help on tariffs and trade issues, but it is also active with cybersecurity and a wide range of tax services.