

FASHION NEWS

Inaugural Fashion Tech Forum in NYC to Bring Together Fashion and Technology Industry Insiders [Exclusive Interview]

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FASHION TECH FORUM

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As the fashion and technology industries began to work together more and more, the need for conversation about the most beneficial ways to collaborate grows.

That's where Karen Harvey, the founder and CEO of Karen Harvey Consulting Group, comes in. On June 25, Harvey will bring together key members of the fashion, technology, retail and design industries for the first-ever Fashion Tech Forum.

The one-day conference, which will be held at Pier 59 Studios in New York City, will serve as a platform for key members of these various industries to connect, converse and collaborate with one another.

"My goal for the conference is for the tech sector and the more traditional retail brands to really understand that each can learn from the other, and they also need to develop talent within their own companies that can be more holistic leaders in the future," Harvey told us.

Harvey has tapped a slew of influential leaders to speak at the inaugural event next month, such as Nasty Gal founder and CEO Sophia Amoruso, Coach executive chairman Lew Frankfort, Gap creative director Rebekka Bay and many more.

Harvey has also launched a competition for fashion tech startups. The Challenge for the Founders of the Future Award, which will be presented by Elle magazine at the Fashion Tech Forum, will provide one startup with \$50,000 and six weeks of mentoring by highly influential industry individuals.

Three finalists, who will be chosen from a pool of applicants based on the originality of their idea, the concept's viability and other criteria, will present their ideas at the Fashion Tech Forum to a judging panel, which will be responsible for selecting a winner. In addition to a fresh idea and a strong plan for making money, Harvey said the applicants also need to have a talented staff that's determined to bring their idea to fruition.

"We care very much about the team. Who are these people? What have they accomplished? It takes relentless will to make these things come to life," Harvey told us.

Applicants can pitch anything from a technology that will change the way people shop to a new game-changing brand.

"My hope is that we discover the next disruptive and impactful fashion tech brand," Harvey told us.

There's still time to apply for the competition, so if you're interested, [click here](#).

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The Business of Fashion

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DAILY DIGEST

5 of Fashion's Top Global Talent Spotters and Matchmakers



LONDON, United Kingdom — They can inhabit many roles — consultant, headhunter, even media mogul — but without their sharp eyes and support, the careers of celebrated designers from Jonathan Saunders to Alber Elbaz may never have taken off. Indeed, such is the pivotal but often unsung role of these talent spotters and matchmakers, whose expertise and instincts have often catapulted designers into the spotlight, as Floriane de Saint Pierre did when she placed Christopher Bailey at Burberry, that it's hard to imagine the industry functioning without them.

Whether they are advising emerging designers or consulting on senior appointments at global luxury brands, fashion's top talent spotters are an indispensable resource, particularly as the costs of making the wrong choice impacts not only a brand's bottom line, but also its image. Paris-based Emmanuel Ungaro, for example, has suffered from increasing irrelevance since the namesake designer and his successor Giambattista Valli left the house, stemming from the barrage of creative directors who have walked through its revolving door, including Esteban Cortazar and Giles Deacon, to make no mention of Lindsay Lohan and her disastrous stint at the brand.

BoF spoke with a few of the fashion world's most celebrated talent spotters and matchmakers in five key markets — the US, the UK, France, China and India — to find out how they identify top creative talent and what more could be done to better equip and nurture young designers.

Karen Harvey (United States)

The storytelling guru helping companies craft their brands



Luxury brand consultant Karen Harvey's lifelong love of fashion and retail led her to found a consultancy, Karen Harvey Consulting Group, which initially offered 'storytelling programs' designed to help companies craft and communicate their brand stories. But eventually, the relationships she built with clients like Kate Spade, Tory Burch and Michael Kors led her to expand into executive recruitment. Indeed, for the past 25 years, she and her team, based in New York and London, have helped labels to not only develop their brand vision, but hire the right talent to execute against it. Most recently, she has been tasked with finding designer Reed Krakoff's replacement at Coach.

Although each case is different, Harvey's general approach is that "if you understand the essence of a brand and if you can really pinpoint the DNA and what the brand codes are, then that becomes the framework for a search for a creative director," she tells BoF. However, she also stresses the value of an often intangible and elusive factor: leadership.

"Of all the hundreds and hundreds of designers there are in the world, not every one of them has real vision; and has the ability to not only hold the vision, but articulate the vision and lead others in execution of that vision," Harvey says. "So sometimes they have great talent, but truthfully they are better individual designers and contributors."

What about young designers who aspire to grow their own brands? As a member of the advisory board for the CFDA's Fashion Incubator program, a two-year professional development course for young designers, Harvey is a firm believer in mentorship, but advises young designers to blend these inputs with their own instincts: "Listen to all the advice you're getting but be very clear on your own brand vision, focus, and be able to filter that input through your own brand."