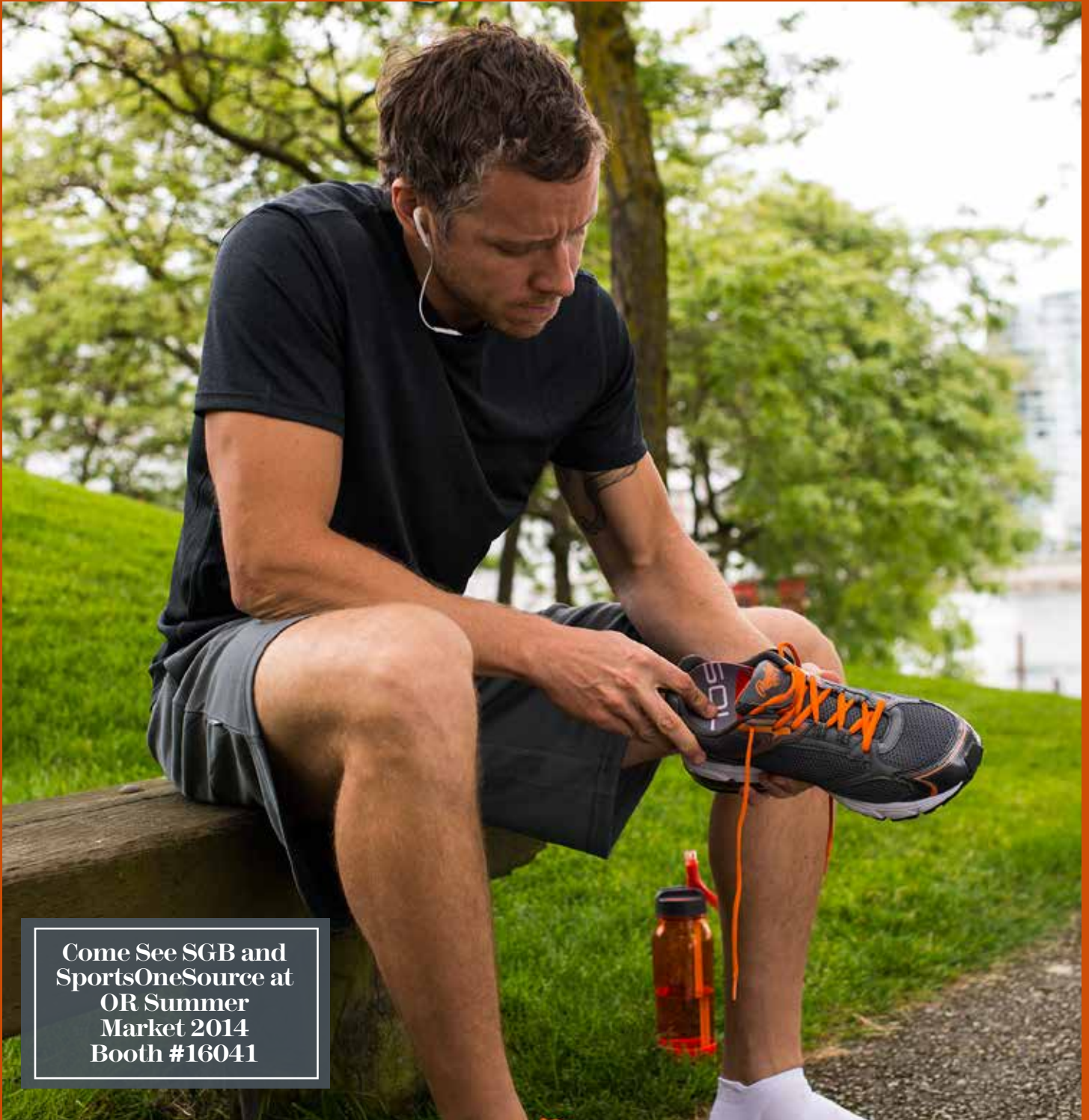


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WEEKLY

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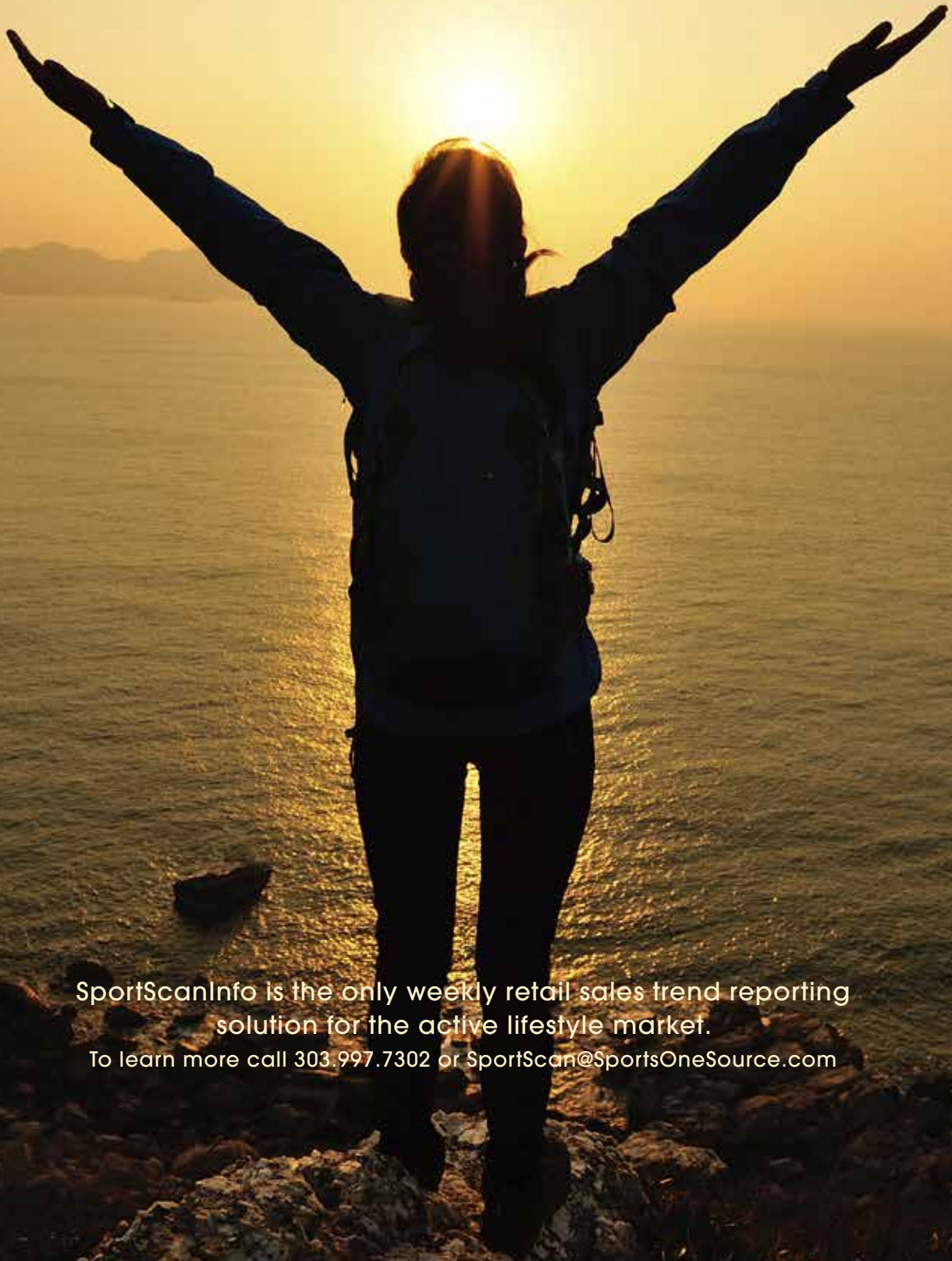


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Bright colors for Spring 2015 will continue to trend for the season

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ON THE COVER: Photo courtesy Sole

MOVERS & SHAKERS

Adidas signed **Andrew Wiggins**, the number one pick overall by the Cleveland Cavaliers in the June draft, according to numerous reports.

Inov-8 recently hired **Gordon Baird** as its CEO. He was most recently at Americana, the company behind the Bench clothing brand, having previously held managing director positions at Timberland Europe, Adidas Northern Europe and Dunlop Slazenger International as well as group president of heritage brands at Wolverine World Wide.

Mountain Khakis has hired designer **Molly Urquhart** as product manager to bolster its product development and design team in Jackson Hole, WY.

Portland Product Werks (PPW), which launched the Woolrich Footwear collection in Fall 2014, appointed **Sports Strategies NW, Inc.** as its sales representative in the Pacific Northwest.

Reebok signed UFC lightweight champion **Anthony Pettis** to a sponsorship deal.

The Running Specialty Group (RSG), part of The Finish Line, Inc. appointed **Scott Goodman** as VP, store operations. Reporting to RSG President Bill Kirkendall, Goodman will lead the groups nearly 800 associates serving the running community nationwide. He was most recently senior district sales manager in Orlando.

Timbuk2, best known for its messenger bags, appointed **Patti Cazzato** as CEO. Cazzato has spent nearly three decades in the soft goods space working to build brands such as Esprit, Sam & Libby, Gap and Levi Strauss. In 2007, she founded an eco-conscious, yoga apparel retailer in San Francisco.



ADIDAS

INTRODUCES FIT SMART TRAINING DEVICE

At the Wearable Technologies Conference 2014 in San Francisco, CA, Adidas unveiled Fit Smart, which measures heart rate, calories, pace, distance and stride rate, all from the user's wrist.

Marrying clean and simple design lines with an intuitive user experience, Fit Smart offers a comfortable soft touch silicon strap. A LED light provides at-a-glance visual guidance on the user's current workout intensity in blue, green, yellow and red color zones. Vibration and visual prompts give feedback and coaching to the user during their workout.

Intended for customers seeking meaningful guidance and feedback, Fit Smart works with a new mobile app experience aimed at helping people set and reach weekly goals, as well as commit to long-term training programs. Weekly goals are a key feature for its August release of the popular miCoach Train and Run App and combine the effectiveness of heart rate-based training with the flexibility and motivational benefits of short-term attainable goals.

"Setting weekly goals initiates a change in mindset that results in much more successful personal training," said Mark Verstegen, president and founder, at Exos, which has provided coaching methodology and training content for the miCoach ecosystem. "Who we are and how we perform are a direct reflection on our existing habits, so much that 90 percent of our daily actions run from our sub-conscious. Creating weekly goals allows you to create winning rituals, which become new habits in weeks. In training terms, you are behaviorally upgrading your operating system and this builds your confidence and courage to be relentless in finding ways to continually upgrade yourself and your performance in the direction of your goals."

Fit Smart stores up to 10 hours of workout data and syncs with the miCoach platform using Bluetooth Smart via the miCoach Train and Run app on the user's mobile phone. From the app the user can customize wristband settings and access hundreds of free training plans created in partnership with the elite coaches at Exos.

"We believe Fit Smart is more than a credible and effective training tool," said Paul Gaudio, general manager of digital sports at Adidas "It is also a real difference maker for people looking to get active and stay active. It works because it measures what you do against weekly goals and personalized training plans to turn your workout data into action and results."

Available in black and translucent white in two sizes, Fit Smart will retail for \$200. The product will be released in late August. In the U.S., FIT SMART will be offered exclusively at Best Buy and bestbuy.com, with availability to follow a few weeks later at Adidas.com, Adidas Sport Performance stores and other leading retailers.

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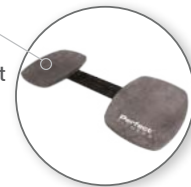
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"TOMORROW NOW"

FLEET FEET INTRODUCES EXPERIENCE 2.0

By Thomas J. Ryan

At its annual franchise conference held in St. Louis, MO in mid-June, Fleet Feet, Inc. introduced Experience 2.0, a comprehensive initiative designed to address both the technological advances that are waylaid the retail marketplace and the significant investments in run that are quickly transforming the running specialty channel.

The theme of the event was "Tomorrow Now," which Jeff Phillips, president and CEO, said in an interview was "our way of communicating that the future is now to evolve our model and move the brand forward." Fleet Feet Sports' 15-member franchise advisory council, formed about 18 months ago, worked with Fleet Feet, Inc. leadership to develop the theme after concluding that the franchisees needed to address two major trends in the market, according to Phillips.

First, there has been a significant investment flowing into the running business. From the vendor side, this includes a number of start-ups and non-traditional running footwear manufacturers targeting the running category. In addition Fleet Feet has seen a "proliferation of distribution" in retail with technical products moving into the sporting goods chains, athletic specialty, online and many other retail stores all targeting the running category.

"We look at proliferation of distribution through the lens of premium technical product that as recently as five years ago was primarily sold in running specialty," said Phillips. "That's just not the case anymore. You can find the majority of our Top 10 selling footwear styles in a lot of places."

The other major trend is driven by technology and the changing behavior of the "digitally empowered consumer" that has emerged over the past several years. Added Phillips, "Everyone now has an iPhone and a tablet with access to an amazing amount of information and product selection."

That led to Experience 2.0, which "goes beyond a fit process or a singular element of our current service model and considers all of the existing and new touch points in which a customer may encounter our brand." The strategy includes a plan to launch e-commerce by the end of 2014 as part of an overall goal of delivering a "seamless omni-channel experience." Fleet Feet is hiring a Director of Marketing to support more consistent messaging and to better leverage the Fleet Feet name across the franchise system. Experience 2.0 also involves raising its game at the store level, including everything from store layout and merchandising to interactions with customers.

“The goal of Experience 2.0 is to drive the evolution of the Fleet Feet Sports experience, and in some cases, reinvent or create entirely new ways of interacting with our customers,” said Phillips “Experience 2.0 is all about customer connectivity.”

Omni-Channel Push

Perhaps the boldest part of the plan is the omni-channel push, including the push into e-commerce.

Fleet Feet decided it didn't want “a bunch of one-offs,” or each store having its own e-commerce site, partly because it would be “really expensive and impractical on a store-by-store basis” for each franchise to build and manage. But Fleet Feet wanted a consistent online interface and message with customers across the brand that will allow all of its franchise partners to participate and benefit.

While the franchisor has worked hard at creating a consistently high-level of in-store customer service across franchises, it would be extremely challenging to achieve a high level of brand consistency across individual franchise online sites.

“As a brand you don't want a customer to have a radically different experience from one store to another or one online site to another, because at that point your brand starts to fracture in that customer's mind,” said Phillips. “Overlaying an e-commerce solution across a retail franchise system is a complex proposition,” and Fleet Feet wanted to make sure e-commerce worked “in a seamless way with the experience we create in the store.”

Fleet Feet's planned e-commerce platform includes a revenue-sharing program, where local franchises are compensated for online sales delivered into their designated marketing area. Said Phillips, “Our model is based on locally owned and operated stores and deep connections with communities and we want our e-commerce interface to reflect this as well.”

Omni-channel will provide greater visibility into inventory – including being able to ship from a store and pick up from a store. We will be able to better leverage customer data to connect with, and reconnect with, our customers.

Ultimately, Phillips said Fleet Feet doesn't want to “walk any customers,” or have a customer shop online or visit a competitor in an out-of-stock situation. Currently, stores can place a special order with a vendor in those situations but the process has numerous communication

points along the way where it can break down and result in an unhappy customer. With an integrated online solution, “If a customer walks in and we don't have a style, size or color, we should be able to have it on their doorstep the next day.”

Phillips said such an integrated omni-channel solution is “virtually nonexistent” in running specialty. This is still the Wild West for the channel. Phillips admitted, “We are definitely trailblazing with what we're doing, but we feel good about the direction we're heading.”

In-Store Experience

At the store level, Fleet Feet is re-examining its interaction with customers including its popular Footwear Fit Process. Said Phillips, “We need to evolve the interaction with our customers and that includes determining what elements of the

process we need to keep; what do we need to tweak; what do we need to change; and what do we need to get rid of?”

across markets. When asking shoppers if they're likely to refer Fleet Feet Sports to a friend or family member, Fleet Feet earned a mark of 92 out of 100. But Rowe noted that customers “want more than that now.” He further pointed out that while customers are often initially surprised at the high level of service at run specialty stores, “when they get the same exceptional experience again and again, it's no longer exceptional. That's a challenge for us.”

At the store level, Rowe sees Experience 2.0 as less about rethinking fit and more about “a culture and an idea we're embracing that we need to continue to get better.”

Phillips said Fleet Feet will be “doubling down” on its in-store experience. This includes training associates to think beyond their role as fit experts to explore the many other needs of



runners, including introducing them to other categories and solutions.” Said Phillips, “It's about the interaction, how we introduce those products, how we communicate with our customers and ultimately how we create a better experience.”

The staff training will be complemented by improvements in store layout and merchandising. Phillips said Fleet Feet doesn't want to only be known as “the place you go to get fit for shoes, inserts and socks.”

Delivering a brand update to vendors, Luke Rowe, SVP, business development, said the Footwear Fit Process program originated because Fleet Feet found that stores weren't “always consistent” in how they approached fitting customers. In many cases, a customer being diagnosed as an overpronator in one visit might come back to the same store and be identified as a neutral runner.

On the positive side, the Fit Process has been significant in bolstering Fleet Feet's reputation

Rowe said Fleet Feet remains committed to apparel because “it gives us the opportunity to change the experience every time our customer



walks into our door,” particularly during seasonal changes. He added, “You can’t do that with the shoe wall.”

Beyond apparel, the goal is to be great in areas outside footwear such as nutrition and accessories and “the retail environment and merchandising is all a part of that,” according to Rowe. As an example, he pointed to a second flagship Fleet Feet that recently opened in Durham, NC where the shoes were taken off the back wall and suspended. An extra focus on apparel is supported by large dressing rooms with a three-way mirror similar to those found in professional apparel retailers. The store is thriving despite competitors such as Lululemon, New Balance, Athleta, Finish Line and a Target all within a half-mile of the store.

“It’s a very sophisticated shopping experience,” said Phillips. “The whole idea is that we have to evolve. We all know that the old school running specialty store is quickly fading into the rearview mirror.”

Marketing Leverage

The company hired a director of marketing to “make sure that everything we do from a branding and messaging standpoint, both locally and nationally, is consistent. It is critical that we have a consistent voice and consistent communication for our brand,” said Phillips.

Fleet Feet has long been interested in exploring ways to leverage marketing programs across the country. This is a strategy that has been embraced by the franchise advisory council and having a consistent message becomes more important with its e-commerce launch and omni-channel initiatives.

Phillips still believes Fleet Feet is “much more effective at spending \$100 locally than \$1,000 nationally.” But at 128 stores, Fleet Feet saw the opportunity to partner with franchisees to create more national campaigns and marketing materials that can be pushed down to the local level.

As a franchisor, Fleet Feet, Inc. is committed to “making their franchise partners lives easier and helping them to make more money.” While Fleet Feet, Inc. doesn’t like to routinely legislate marketing ideas to its franchisees, “if we can develop great materials and messaging at the national level that our franchisees don’t have to recreate over and over on their own, that helps make their lives easier.”

The goal is to orchestrate three to four national outreach events each year.

Expanding The Retail Footprint

Experience 2.0 comes as Fleet Feet has significantly ramped up its expansion. By the end of this year, the franchisor will have expanded its footprint by almost 40 percent over the past two years.

It added 21 stores last year and expects to exceed its initial plan to add another 20 in 2014. That’s a significant increase from only six opened in 2012, three in 2011 and four in 2010.

Phillips said part of the growth is coming from existing franchisees opening a second, third or fourth location to “protect and own their market.” Several other regional running stores are also adding locations amid the consolidation taking place in the running specialty channel. But it is also a reflection on the fact that Fleet Feet now has many ways to expand.

Beyond opening new franchises and franchisees adding locations, other vehicles include acquiring independent stores and converting them to Fleet Feet stores and opening stores from scratch. The newest growth vehicle is

converting independent stores to franchised locations. Over the last year, Fleet Feet has completed four such independent conversions, representing a total of six stores. Said Phillips, “It’s a nice balance to expand our retail footprint. We have a lot of different ways we can grow.”

Phillips said the ongoing consolidation has had “very little impact on us on a market-by-market basis and store-by-store basis.” He attributes that to its locally owned and operated model, as well as Fleet Feet’s “very inclusive approach to customers” across franchises. That includes its outreach efforts to non-runners who want to become active with programs such as No Boundaries.

Phillips said such outreach efforts helped the average Fleet Feet store reach over \$1.4 million in revenue last year as compared to about \$800,000 for the average running specialty store, according to market statistics. Fleet Feet’s average store size expanded to more than 3,000 square feet from just under 2,000 square feet a decade ago, due to successes reaching non-runners as well as the expansion of categories such as accessories and bras.

“The key to Fleet Feet’s success is local ownership, which includes local buying and local marketing and outreach,” said Phillips, “If there’s any magic dust to what we do, it’s our commitment to the local owner/operator model. This is what drives the deep personal connections with people and communities that make the brand powerful locally and relevant nationally.”

As far as future expansion, Phillips said Fleet Feet doesn’t have “any intention of taking our foot off the accelerator.” While he admitted that “there’s no shortage of running stores or places to buy technical running shoes, there are a lot of markets that don’t have a good resource for what we do which is providing an inclusive environment for people looking to live a more healthy, active lifestyle as opposed to being just another running store.”

Phillips said Fleet Feet’s ongoing goal is to elevate its brand positioning from a place that “just sells running shoes” to a place that supports healthy active lifestyles. He added, “We do so much more than sell running shoes - we help people feel better, look better, lose weight, reduce stress, and even reduce their long-term healthcare liability. That is a pretty compelling value proposition.”

He said the overall running category might waver, including recent disruption caused by a shift away from the minimalism trend as well as a fashion shift toward basketball shoes. But Phillips doesn’t “see any slowdown or end to the desire for people to live healthy, active lifestyles because it’s the best health insurance you can buy. And that’s what drives our business.”



2014 NATIONAL FRANCHISE CONFERENCE

FLEET FEET HONORS ITS FINEST

By Thomas J. Ryan

Fleet Feet, Inc. honored the outstanding contributions and accomplishments of its franchisees and store employees during its annual National Franchise Conference, in St. Louis, MO, June 22-27.

Franchise owners and employees from across the 128-store system and representatives from more than 80 industry vendors gathered for a week focused on business planning, networking, and a trade show designed exclusively for Fleet Feet Sports franchisees. Attendees also had the opportunity to choose from more than 50 classes over two days taught by a combination of Fleet Feet, Inc. staff, franchisees, store employees, vendors and outside consultants. Education focused on the customer experience, fit, financial and inventory management, people development, and community outreach with the consistent theme of continuing to evolve and improve the brand.

“This week we rolled out Experience 2.0 to our franchisees and key vendors. Experience 2.0 is our long-term strategic approach to evolving and sometimes reinventing the Fleet Feet Sports experience to meet the new expectations of our customers while remaining fiercely committed to who we are and what got us here,” said Fleet Feet’s President and CEO Jeff Phillips. “This approach encompasses our omni-channel strategy and will allow Fleet Feet Sports to move the brand forward as the undisputed industry leader.”

FITlanthropy Grants support Fleet Feet stores’ charitable contributions at the local level. Grants were awarded to six stores on behalf of major vendor partners as follows:

- » *Brooks Sports and Moving Comfort awarded Fleet Feet Sports Mt. Pleasant, SC a grant for Support the Girls providing sports bras for young women in the JROTC in the Charleston County School District, many of whom are in high poverty, Title One schools.*
- » *Balega, Int. awarded Fleet Feet Sports Winston-Salem, NC a grant for Mission: Feet First. The mission distributes*

properly fitted footwear, insoles and socks to the homeless and under-privileged children and families. Since 2010, Mission: Feet First has provided these items to more than 1,500 people.

- » *Saucony awarded Fleet Feet Sports Nashville, TN* a grant to continue to support Amputee Blade Runners to realize their dream of competing in the Endeavor Games, a nationally recognized competition that allows athletes with disabilities to participate in a multi-sport event.
- » *New Balance awarded Fleet Feet Sports West Hartford, CN and Fleet Feet Sports Stamford, CT* a grant for their partnership and support of the local Achilles International Chapter helping athletes with disabilities prevented from taking part in athletic events like running and triathlons. The stores' partnership toward the cause provides more than financial support, it includes coaching, training partners and race guides.
- » *Nike awarded Fleet Feet Sports Tulsa, OK* a grant for Zoomerangs, its youth running program in north Tulsa. For the past three years the store has provided a structured youth running program for kids without access to the sport to help motivate and to build self-confidence. The grant will allow the program to expand into more area schools.
- » *Superfeet awarded Fleet Feet Sports Spokane, WA* a grant for their involvement with Active4Youth - a free, district-wide, elementary cross country running program offered in collaboration with the Spokane Public Schools. In addition to providing water stops, footwear, and outfitting coaches, the grant will be used to increase the number of coaching stipends so that more kids can participate in the program.

Anniversaries - The following Fleet Feet stores were recognized for their 10- and 30-year anniversaries:

- » *10 years* - Bonney Lake, WA; Coeur d'Alene, ID; Columbus, OH; Huntsville, TN; Redding, CA; Rochester, NY; Tucson, AZ; and Vacaville, CA
- » *30 years* - Fair Oaks, CA

No Boundaries Awards - For the first time, Fleet Feet, Inc. presented No Boundaries Awards on behalf of the program's sponsor, New Balance, to those who have had a major impact on this life-changing training program.

- » *Mentors* - Ann Conte, Syracuse, NY; Robyn Hatch, St Louis, MO; Barbara Knack, Spokane, WA; Gretchen Mosely, Tulsa, OK; Parker Pearson, Roanoke, VA
- » *Coach* - Karen Floeckher, Madison, WI
- » *Training Director* - Monica Mannino, Roanoke, VA

Scholarships of Achievement were awarded to Fleet Feet Sports employees and students. Since 1999, Fleet Feet, Inc. has helped more than 150 young adults associated with Fleet Feet Sports pursue their educational goals and career aspirations. Recipients included: Flor Alvarez, Fleet Feet Sports Gaithersburg, MD; Sharlie Brooks, Fleet Feet Sports Montgomery, AL; Joshua Greer, Fleet Feet Sports Murfreesboro, TN; Casey and Madison Lewis, Fleet Feet Sports Roanoke, VA; Kelsey Hughes, Fleet Feet Sports Tulsa, OK; and Ashley Rewick, Fleet Feet Sports Vacaville, CA. ■



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STAYING HYDRATED TO STAY FIT

Spring 2015 Delivers

By Fernando J. Delgado



No matter the circumstances, athletes and outdoor enthusiasts will always need to stay hydrated. Whether out on a hike, riding a bike or going for a run, water quenches our thirst, fuels our bodies and allows us to keep moving to do the activities we love.

In 2015, retailers will be able to count on state-of-the-art water bottles, hydration systems and hydration packs to deliver that ever-so-essential water to consumers – as well as dependable sales.

Hydration year-to-date as of July 5 is up 2.7 percent in units sold and up 4 percent in total dollars according to point-of-sale data compiled by SportScanInfo. The Water Bottle category has also seen solid growth up 5 percent year-to-date in both units and dollars sold.

SGB previews of the latest hydration systems for 2015 from today's leading manufacturers revealing both interesting color trends and functionality, among other innovations sure to take hydration to new levels.

To read more on this story, check out SGB/August Issue!



Avex's Brazos Autoseal Bottle, \$20, employs the patented Autoseal® lid technology, which automatically seals between drinks to eliminate spills and leaks. The 24 oz.-capacity bottle delivers convenience, performance and style with the help of double wall insulation that keeps drinks cold longer and prevents condensation.



Dakin's Men's Hot Laps 1.5L Hip Pack, \$35, is highlighted by a deployable side water bottle pocket and a breathable air mesh back panel. Other specs include grippy mesh on the waist belt, internal fleece lining, mesh pockets and a reflective logo.



CamelBak's Podium Ice Bottle, \$25, features Jet Valve technology, a higher flow rate, an easier-to-clean cap and more flexible bottle walls. Aerogel insulation keeps water cold four times longer than traditional sports bottles.

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For 2015, High Sierra is introducing a new water bottle collection that includes the Stuff-N-Go Bag In A Bottle packs. Available in a 15L daypack and 18L sport duffel, the bags are sold inside the new 1,000ml water bottle, giving outdoor enthusiasts everything they need in one small and convenient package. The Stuff-N-Go Duffels will list for \$25, while the Stuff-N-Go Backpacks will be \$20.



Nathan's VaporAir, \$150, is the brand's lightest-weight men's race vest in the Vapor Series. It is equipped with a 2L bladder with quick release valve, as well as two easy-access front bottle pockets.

Polar Bottle's Star Spangled 24oz. Water Bottle, \$12, features an insulating layer between two walls of plastic, keeping liquids cool twice as long as other water bottles. The "Made in the USA" message is a result of the company's commitment to manufacture stateside.



Vapur's Element Anti-Bottle folds flat when empty, allowing it to go anywhere. Lighter and easier to hold than regular rigid bottles, the Element and its integrated SuperCap were designed from the ground up to meet the needs of outdoor enthusiasts. Available in .7L (pictured) and 1L.

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A man in a dark blue and red sleeveless shirt and grey shorts is running on a paved path through a park. The path is lined with large, mature trees with green foliage. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day. The man is captured in mid-stride, looking forward.

INSOLES GO BEYOND CUSHIONING

Well beyond shock absorption, aftermarket insoles better tailor the fit, support and comfort of footwear to feet.

By Thomas J. Ryan

In running footwear, construction has shifted from minimalism to increased cushioning, including a maximalism trend signified by the popularity of Hoka One One. For the manufacturers of insoles, this highlights the role they have as tools for injury prevention.

“What sort of insoles are in your shoes, whether they are a highly cushioned model or not, is still very important because a cushioned shoe does not automatically come with a superior insole,” said Jeff Antonioli, VP global sales and marketing, Spenco Medical Corp. “In fact, most insoles are nothing more than sock liners. Orthotic insoles, like those Spenco provides, aid in the biomechanics of an athlete’s foot strike, roll and push-off no matter what kind of shoe they are wearing. Spenco’s insoles complement a highly cushioned shoe in that they also provide proper arch support which can help reduce injury.”

Masterfit CEO Steve Cohen said his company was among those warning athletes about the risks around the minimalism/barefoot trend.

“It was like The Emperor’s New Clothes fairy tale,” said Cohen. “It seemed nobody wanted to question the obvious. Footwear evolved over millenniums to create support and cushioning systems to help the foot operate more efficiently and protect it from injury. Suddenly we’re told that all that technical evolution was wrong? It didn’t make sense. It was like being told that seat belts and air bags were bad for auto safety because they made drivers complacent. For us, it’s a welcome return to sanity. Insoles are a key component in supporting, stabilizing and cushioning the foot.”

On the positive, the whole phase seems to have educated athletes about the importance of using the proper footbed, regardless a low-volume or over-sized shoe.

“Just like we saw with minimalism, there is a pendulum that swings back and forth and right now it is swinging toward a maximalist shoe,” said Ellen Harwick, communications manager, Superfeet Worldwide, Inc. “That is exactly why we make multiple shapes and use multiple materials. There are still folks who prefer minimal. Not all are going to love a maximalist experience. We need to be able to make products that fit and function well in all of those environments, and that’s exactly what Superfeet does.”

Added Drew Davies, national sales manager for Sof Sole, “We have always been driven to offer a solution for stability and shock absorption, and are pleased to have both our Airr Insoles that offer maximum comfort and breathability, along with our Thin Fit Insoles that utilize technology to keep it compact while still doubling the cushioning in low-volume footwear such as cleats.”

“These “trends” always effect us in some way,” added Evan Wert, president of Icebug USA, the distributor of ArchFlex insoles, of the shift toward cushioning. “But we understand there is always some new way to make shoes. That said, one thing that never changes is that everyone can benefit from wearing some form of extra support in their footwear. If anything, the trend to make thicker, softer shoes makes it even more important as the joints of the foot are even more unstable.”

Regardless of footwear construction trends, David Church, president Sorbothane, Inc., said Sorbothane insoles will continue to focus on insoles that add cushioning, absorb shock and provide comfort without sacrificing performance.

“This has always been the strength of Sorbothane insoles,” said Church. “Whether walking, running, hiking or standing - consumers are looking for a quality insole that will support and cradle their foot in natural comfort and provide a layer of impact

protection. The addition of a Sorbothane Comfort and Performance Insole to any shoe will help prevent injury, relieve pain and provide comfort by absorbing impact shock before it enters the body.”

Sorbothane will showcase the Ultra Sole, \$26, at the Outdoor Retailer Summer Market featuring a molded lightweight base for cushioning and arch support; a cupped heel; Sorbothane Gel Metatarsal insert for energy return, shock-absorption and cushioning; a Sorbothane Heel insert that absorbs up to 94 percent of impact shock; a Poron liner that’s inherently antifungal; and a polyester fabric top for moisture management. “Durable, comfortable, and proven to relieve pain, Sorbothane Ultra Sole insoles enable you to do what you do, even longer,” said Church.



Sorbothane Ultra Sole

Sof Sole will debut the Memory Plus Insole, \$16, as well as its first insole designed for work featuring dense, lightweight, high-impact memory foam that molds to the foot for cushioning and a low profile trim-to-fit design.

The Sof Sole Work Insole, \$18 offers an anti-fatigue core that redistributes pressure and reduces impact forces. It’s also equipped with a deep heel cup for maximum stability and a Coolmax moisture wicking top cover. “We

are excited to add the Sof Sole Work insole as the perfect complement to our line of shock absorption insoles,” said Davies. “The Work insole offers an anti-fatigue core and works in all types of boots and shoes, perfect for people who spend a great



Sof Sole Memory Plus Insole (above) and Work Insole (below)

amount of time working - or playing - on their feet.”

Stemming from the success of Sof Sole’s Fit Series that was introduced in 2012, Sof Sole is also updating the entire Fit line. The new products will combine a more shock-absorbent body with the stabilizing heel and arch plates tailored to each arch type. In addition, its in-store fitting system will be enhanced



Photo courtesy Sole

while still aiming to keep the process low-maintenance for easy placement at retail locations.

Superfeet will celebrate its one-year anniversary of the Carbon Insole, \$50, at Outdoor Retailer Summer Market. The Carbon is Superfeet's thinnest insole with a proprietary blend of materials, EvoLyte, to give it its strongest heel cap. It also features Superfeet's ADD/APTTM System, and new, durable



Superfeet Carbon Insole

lightweight foam. "It was a huge success and still going strong," said Harwick. "It was initially designed to meet the demand for lightweight running shoes, but has exceeded our expectations at every

turn. It works in cleated footwear and ski boots. We have consumers reaching out with their Carbon stories and it really has no limit for where it can be used."



Spenco Total Support Insoles (left) and Quickthotics Component Insole System (right)

Spenco's core lineup continues to be its Total Support Insoles, \$40 that come in Thin, Original and Max, and feature the 3-Pod Modulation System. By positioning pods with varying degrees of hardness beneath key areas of the foot, Total Support Insoles change the ground forces reaching the foot during activity for increased performance and comfort while helping to reduce over-pronation.

Spenco's latest introduction is the Quickthotics Component Insole System, a quick, cost-effective, customizable orthotic insole

found only in physicians' offices. "Doctors can now make their diagnosis and dispense high-quality, durable prescription orthotics in their office in less than 10 minutes," said Antonioli. "The insoles come with die-cut, self-adhesive heel and forefoot wedges, interchangeable arch supports, heel lifts, and other prescription options."

Sidas will introduce 3Feet Active Insoles, \$50, designed for sports that require dynamic forward foot flexion. Available in three styles to fit a range of foot shapes, the 3Feet Active Insoles series feature a specially designed shell to support low, medium and high arches, a gel pad under the heel for cushioning, forefoot perforations for breathability and are constructed to aid forefoot propulsion. "The new 3Feet Active Insoles allow us to match the arch height to the athletes foot, creating better energy transfer and mechanics," said Jay Taylor, president of The Soze Group (TSG), North American distributors of the French-based specialist. "It enables us to work with the individual to fine tune a product that enhances the fit of their footwear."



Sidas 3Feet Active Insoles

Taylor also said that while Sidas offers cushioning and shock absorption materials in many of its insoles, they are included based on the demands of specific sports and not on footwear trends. Said Taylor, "Our insoles are designed primarily on the following criteria: foot shape, movement and pressure; activity type (run, hike, bike, etc.); and type of footwear"



CurrexSole will continue to focus on manufacturing sports-specific insoles. It currently offers insoles designed specifically for run, ski, cycling, cleat, ski and skate. "CurrexSole insoles work for all types of running shoes - from minimalist to maximalist and everything in between - because of our zero mm drop CurrexSole respects the geometry and characteristic technology of any running shoe," said Lutz Klein, CEO and M.D., CurrexSole Americas.

A highlight from the German-based insoles specialist is the RunPro, \$50, featuring an individualized fit for runners. The insole has a zero mm drop so it won't interfere with shoe construction and geometry. Each insole comes in three different heights (low, medium and high). In its U.S. specialty retail stores, CurrexSole also offer Footdisc, a device designed to simply and efficiently measure the foot shape, size and geometry. Data on thousands of runners is built into the product, allowing precise measurement without the time-consuming task of heat molding or grinding.

“The static foot test is our base, but what makes us unique is our patented fitting process, that combines the individual’s knee rotation and leg axis with their foot profile,” said Klein. “The outcome of these two measurements allows us to precisely forecast the foot’s motion behavior, selecting the correct insole for that foot.”

From **Footbalance**, the QuickFit Yellow, \$45, offers shock absorption and comfort with light support. Self-molding technology allows the user to customize the footbeds in one of two ways: wear mold or heat mold. The insoles are geared toward low to medium impact activities and sports; as well as mid-high arch, narrow width footwear.



Footbalance QuickFit Yellow

be changed easily without removing the insole. While a wall charger is included, a USB cable is also available for charging. The comfort level is upgraded with the addition of Polyurethane foam that is breathable, conducts heat efficiently, and has great retention and shock absorbency. Both insoles are trim to fit.

“With the introduction of ThermaCELL Heated Insoles ProFlex, we have broadened the appeal of our product to reach a very active customer base who wants to spend time outdoors in the winter without being forced inside because of cold feet,” said Josh Silvia, marketing manager for ThermaCELL Heated Insoles. “Now virtually anyone can stand up to the elements longer with added features of a replaceable battery for extended warmth and a more flexible insole which is compatible with more footwear than ever before.”



Powerstep ComfortLast Cushioning Insoles

At **Powerstep**, the ComfortLast Cushioning Insoles, \$30, combine shock-absorbing gel technology and slow-recovery foam. Plush cushioning throughout the full length of the insole and shock-absorbing gel at the

heel soften the impact during stride. The cushioning softens and conforms to the foot over time taking a custom-like impression of the foot, and the anatomically contoured shape incorporates an arch support and heel cradle for comfort. It’s ideal for preventing and alleviating metatarsal, arch or heel discomfort. “The gel is contoured to support the arch and heel to improve the biomechanics of the foot, and shock-absorbing gel technology at the heel softens the impact of each step,” said Mindy Moreland, customer service and marketing manager.

Also from Powerstep, the Archmolds Maximum Heat Moldable Footbed, \$41, offers 3mm of polyurethane foam for shock absorption and protection. Taking less than five minutes and using a simple toaster oven, the heat moldable EVA base layer allows for a personalized fit for full contact support and includes a moisture-wicking, antibacterial top fabric.

Dr. Scholl's Active Series, \$20 to \$25, are engineered with Triple Zone Protection to relieve and prevent pain from common sports injuries. The ball of the foot features thick padding to distribute pressure and improve cushioning during the forceful push-off phase. A reinforced arch structure provides support during pronation and supination while a slightly raised foam area in the arch improves transition of



Dr. Scholl's Active Series

weight from landing to push-off. In the heel, a foam pad absorbs shock at impact but remains responsive. A deep heel cup helps the foot stay securely in place during intense movements and cradles the heel, maximizing its natural cushioning ability.

At **Sole** the Softec Ultra, \$45, offers its thickest Softec cushioning (3.2mm) and features a moisture-wicking top sheet and 35 percent recycled content. The orthopedic shape optimizes natural motion by providing moldable custom support, equalized pressure distribution,



Sole Softec Ultra

reduced plantar fascia strain, increased balance and feel, enhanced alignment and improved natural heel cushioning. Michael Baker, Sole’s CEO, believes that while the barefoot and minimalist trend was born in part as a reaction to overly structured and posted footwear that was being over sold at the time, the cushioning trend is healthier for the insoles category.

“Our view is that a shoe with a neutral midsole and a quality accommodative footbed is the best solution for 90 percent of the population in terms of enhancing fit and performance and helping to reduce injury,” said Baker. “As such, the maximalist trend is better for the insole story (when compared to minimalist) given there isn’t an inherent aversion to adding something more to the shoe and most maximalist shoes have a neutral midsole.” ■

Masterfit’s new QuikBeds process takes the grind - and glue - out of making hi-definition custom insoles. “It’s the fastest, easiest and cleanest system on the market for retailers who want to make top-shelf custom products,” said Cohen. The QuikBeds system lets retailers create custom insoles in less than 15 minutes with minimal staff training. The capital investment in tooling is under \$1,500. Models for gait sports (hiking, running, etc.), skiing/snowboarding and cycling are available. Blanks and posts wholesale for around \$43 and completed insoles sell for \$130 to \$195.

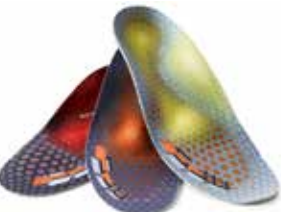


Masterfit's QuikBeds

ArchFlex offers the ArchFlex Premier, \$45, the original ArchFlex insole offering 5mm of cushioning combined with their 360-degree support system to help the foot move more naturally with just the right amount of support. The insole also uses a Polyiou foam layer for added comfort and shock absorption.



ArchFlex Premier (above) and ArchFlex Slim (below)



The ArchFlex Slim, \$45, features 2mm of cushioning and the Arch Flex 360 degree support system. It is designed for footwear where volume is an issue, such as running, sports or dress shoes.

ThermaCELL, a brand of Schawbel Technologies, LLC, is introducing the ThermaCELL Heated Insoles ProFlex, \$180, for outdoor athletes to brave the elements longer with added comfort. Both the original ThermaCELL Heated Insoles and ProFLEX versions have temperature settings controlled by a wireless remote that allow the user to choose from two heat settings - 100°F and 111, as well as no heat, without taking off their shoes. The insoles are also water resistant.



ThermaCELL Heated Insoles ProFlex

The ProFlex adds a removable, rechargeable battery that can



THE PROMISE OF PLUSH CUSHIONING CONTINUES ITS COMEBACK

A host of running brands will debut oversized and thicker mid-soled shoes for Spring 2015.

By Thomas J. Ryan

Skora FIT
Photo courtesy Skora

While the running industry wildly experimented with minimalism for a few years, the pendulum has now swung heavily towards maximalism. For Spring 2015, a host of brands will debut oversized and thicker mid-soled shoes.

When a runner tries on a maximal shoe for the first time, the pillowy experience wins them over. Many runners also feel that overly cushioned shoes are safer than minimalist shoes that often require a transition period, if they even worked at all.

Some, however, feel maximalism remains just a small niche market category and the sweet spot remains neutral with ample – albeit not exactly plump - cushioning.

“It’s nice to see neutral continuing to gain ground,” said Golden Harper, founder of Altra. “It seems that while runners in general are trending toward more cushioning, they still want their shoes to be lightweight and natural while still having enough cushioning to take on long mileage.”

Many of the hallmarks of the minimalist trend remain – including

the push for ever more lightweight shoes as well as the benefits of a more flexible mid-sole, proprioception, and encouraging a forefoot/mid-foot strike. Even Hoka, the leader in maximal, stands out for being extremely lightweight for its size with its Meta-Rocker designed to promote accurate foot roll through the gait cycle. Some also feel there’s remains a place for minimal shoes.

“Minimalism has stabilized in a way by morphing itself into what we call “natural” shoes with features like more anatomically shaped toe boxes and without elevated heels working their way into shoes that still have enough cushioning to reduce stress on the feet,” augured Harper.

Claire Wood, senior product manager at New Balance, agreed that “neutral continues to be a zone with a lot of innovation and runners are gravitating towards this style.”

But Wood also noted that with the minimalist craze and now the maximalist movement, runners are recognizing that they can have different experiences on their runs. That’s opening up more options for a variety of

shoes for runners and more experimentation for running vendors.

“The lines aren’t as clear, and foggier lines makes for more innovation and ways of creating fantastic running experiences,” said Wood.

SGB reviews the design approach both the major and minor running brands have taken for Spring 2015.

Brooks Running sees the neutral category being “on fire right now,” led by strength this year in the Glycerin 12 and Ghost 7.

Kira Harrison, Brooks’ footwear merchandising associate, said the minimalism trend led runners to expect lighter, more purposeful designs in their shoes, but many of them are asking for cushioning “rather than a true minimalist experience” and still others are looking for greater support. Overall, runners are looking for a greater selection.

“As more and more people run and fall in love with the sport, they want to be able to choose the experience that’s right for them,” said Harrison. “Some days that might mean feeling the run and other days that might mean floating through it.”

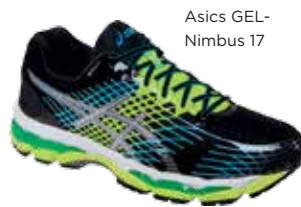
Shoes that ‘Float’ - Transcend 2’s max cushioning experience is taken to the next level in Spring 2015 by offering a softer underfoot feel through new geometries in the mid-sole and redesigned forefoot lugs for a more cushioned strike and with more bounce. The Transcend 2 also offers a dual mesh upper construction, welded overlays and an external heel counter to create a plush in-shoe feel.

Shoes that ‘Feel’ - Cadence, Flow and Connect in the PureProject 4 all add an open vamp design that reduces overlays and maximizes forefoot freedom. New saddle and Nav Band designs provide a conformable, secure fit. The shoes also come with traditional, independent tongue construction designed specifically for the PureProject collection and add a soft, wrap-around collar lining that eliminates seams around the foot.

Overall, Harrison said Brooks remains committed to using smarter materials that take the weight out of the shoe and bring the upper closer to the foot while continuing to maintain fit and structure.

“Trends such as minimalism and maximalism are fantastic because they push innovation in the core category and they reflect the runner’s desire to have options,” said Harrison. “We see minimalist and maximalist trends as here to stay, each settling in at their respective ends of the running experience spectrum. But core will remain the majority of the market share.”

At **Asics**, a key update for Spring 2015 is the GEL-Nimbus 17, which drops more than half an ounce to rank as the lightest version of the GEL-Nimbus. The weight savings is due in large part to the redesigned seamless FluidFit upper that stretches, hugs and moves with the foot.



Asics GEL-Nimbus 17

Additional weight loss was achieved with the introduction of a new FluidRide midsole; which is Asics’ latest evolution in midsole technology providing the combination of 15 percent weight reduction with 20 percent more bounce back.

The latest version of the Nimbus also features a rearfoot gel unit that extends under the lateral midfoot for additional shock attenuation and protection for neutral runners. A new X-40 Comfordry sockliner and last team up to provide underfoot comfort.

Asics is also introducing a new collection of speed products that feature the 20th anniversary of the GEL-DS Trainer and 10th anniversary of the GEL-Noosa Tri, as well as two new shoes in the speed category: the GEL-Hyper Tri and the Piranha SP 5. For the maximal trend, Asics will introduce the GEL-Fortify, built with a new maximum support specific last and a BioMorphic Fit Upper to comfortably accommodate higher volume feet.

Brice Newton, senior product manager running footwear, Asics America, believes the maximalism trend with its focus on cushioning and comfort offers wider appeal to more runners than minimalism. But Asics still offers many shoes that are “flexible and really lightweight” and he believes the maximalism trend again extends the running experience for runners. Said Newton, “It comes back to the idea that you should mix up your run and it’s good to have multiple shoes in your shoe bag.”

Brooks Transcend 2



Saucony is introducing the Iso-Series, engineered with its new IsoFit technology. A soft inner sleeve and floating support cage combines to create a dynamic fit system that adapts to the shape and motion of the runner’s foot for a sock-like fit for comfort and allows the shoe to move in harmony with the foot.

“It’s a foot technology that adapts to each different foot but then also adapts to the body’s movement so the mid-system moves with the foot and gives you a plush feel throughout your whole run,” said Patrick O’Malley, Saucony’s SVP of global product.

The series also features the new PWRGrid+ midsole platform that is 20 percent more cushioned and 15 percent more resilient than standard midsoles while maintaining fluid transitions for a smooth ride.

“We wanted to create a plush ride underneath the foot but still allow the foot to do all the things that it needs to do such as flex and toe off,” said O’Malley.



Saucony Triumph

The Iso-Series includes the Triumph, the plushest shoe Saucony created; as well as the Hurricane. It’s also featuring in a new shoe, the Zealot, which is two-ounces lighter than the Triumph and built with a 4mm offset to deliver a lightweight, fast and highly-cushioned shoe. Said O’Malley, “It’s a great transi-

tion shoe for people who are moving away from minimalism but still want to work the lower part of their legs.”

Saucony has no plans to offer a maximalist shoe. O’Malley believes consumers are looking for a “cushioned ride but believes the consumer needs to utilize all the muscles and the joints so we think we have a great combination of plush cushioning along with great flexibility.”

The Iso-Series plays up the importance of fit to runners.

“We find fit is such an important thing and quite honestly if we can be the brand that can own fit than we’re going to be really addressing a good need for the consumer,” said O’Malley.



Saucony Zealot

Jim Van Dine, president of **Hoka**

One One, believes the ‘maximal’ trend is largely a response to the success that Hoka has enjoyed with its ultra-size and over-size shoes. Van Dine noted, “It seems that most running shoe brands are developing – or at least offering – shoes that they promise will provide benefits similar to Hoka shoes.”

The apparent copycats come as Hoka is enjoying “exponential growth” this year with new accounts opening each week with ultra runners responding to its higher volume, softer density and greater rebounding versus standard running shoes. Hoka’s store count, nearly all run specialty accounts, has grown to over 550, up from 92 at the close of 2012.

To support the demand, Hoka has made a number of internal hires, including adding Mark Mastalir as VP of marketing, and considerable investments in race sponsorships and athlete endorsements, including 2012 Olympic 1500-meter silver medalist Leo Manzano. Hoka also recently developed a separate group of shoes for sporting goods and athletic specialty stores that are distinctly different than the Hoka shoes sold in run specialty stores.

“We will have four new styles within the sporting goods/athletic specialty assortment,” said Van Dine. “And, for our run specialty dealers, we are introducing a new shoe, The Constant, that will be our most supportive shoe.”

The Constant is a road shoe built with a mix of RMAT high-rebound material and EVA to blend a high level of support with traditional Hoka cushioning. The RMAT midsole geometry is built around the high-pressure zones of the traditional gait cycle to provide increased durability and

guided support. The upper features a Lycra mono-wrap tongue designed to support the foot through the arch, and asymmetrical lacing to reduce pressure across the top of the foot. Said Van Dine, “It is designed to be the most stable shoe in our line – though it is still a neutral shoe.”

Hoka One One
The Constant



For Spring 2015, **Mizuno** will deliver a significant update with the Wave Rider 18. Key refinements include a modified outsole pattern for a better underfoot feeling and added durability, a reconfigured upper for the optimal fit that embraces the foot and works in harmony with the runner, and an upgraded sockliner for a more resilient, responsive ride.



Mizuno Wave Rider 18

“For the Wave Rider, the ideal experience would be an ultra-smooth, flowing ride, a fit that perfectly embraces the foot in all the right places, and category-leading lightness in the neutral trainer silo,” said Doug Smiley, business unit manager - footwear, Mizuno USA.

A big milestone for Mizuno in 2014 is the launch of its brand campaign “What If Everybody Ran?” which united the running community to share inspirational running stories and showcased the transformative power of running across the U.S.

But the major focus for Mizuno is on “delivering ideal and differentiated running experiences.” said Smiley. While running trend changes have “truly accelerated” over the last few years, Mizuno expects to “connect with runners, irrespective of what seasonal trends are currently grabbing headlines by staying true to our proven formula and design philosophy.”

As an example, Smiley pointed to two models - the Wave Hitogami and Wave Paradox - that are “on opposite ends of the spectrum. Yet, both are connecting with runners in a major way.”

The Wave Hitogami performance trainer delivers a fast, sleek ride ideal for race day or fast tempo runs while the Wave Paradox, which sits in its maximum support silo, gives runners a stable, smooth ride with category-leading lightness (10.6 oz. for a men’s Size 9). Said Smiley, “Both are finding their audience this season, and yet neither is purposefully tied to a seasonal trend. It’s our belief that runners will always gravitate towards these transformative running experiences, season after season.”

New Balance continues to expand on its Fresh Foam platform in 2015 using existing evolutions in its ‘Data to Design’ process. Wood called the original Fresh Foam 980 this spring an “extremely successful launch,” with revenues well over projections.

“There are several reasons for the success of this launch, including the growing desire in the market for neutral runners,” said Wood. “We believe that, for example, two neutral runners of the same build, similar stride, etc. could crave totally different experiences underfoot. Addressing the ‘ride’ someone can experience, through various foams, compounds, and geometries can deliver a variety of experiences.”

The Fresh Foam Trail arrives this month while next spring comes the Fresh Foam Boracay, a 980 update, that applies strike and impact patterns from runners’ data to contribute to the flexibility



New Balance Fresh Foam Boracay



New Balance Fresh Foam Zante

and ride. Also for 2015, a new model, the Fresh Foam Zante, brings a faster, speedier feel to the collection in an everyday running shoe.

“The Fresh Foam Zante used a separate data collection, with our interest and focus on midfoot striking and faster speeds, and what sort of geometries this would encourage,” said Wood. “A simple, yet technical upper with no-sew overlays and a bootie construction give the midfoot a snug, smooth fit.”

Other updates for Spring 2015 include the 860v5 stability model with the addition of Ortholite and a generous usage of no-sew construction in the upper heightening the in-shoe feel. The go-fast REVlite 890v5 accentuates subtle design changes to bring a touch more sleekness. New to REVlite is the 1500, a cousin to the popular 1400, bringing stable geometries and a slight dual density to the lightweight training category.

New Balance will also continue to develop its Minimus line as part of its Sports Research Lab’s ongoing study of lightweight and low profile shoes. Said Wood, “I think what we learned has helped us to develop groundbreaking new styles.”

Newton Running plans to build on this year’s successful launch of its +ONE technology, which added a fifth lug to Newton’s award-winning four-lug Action/Reaction cushioning system, as well as its POP programs that expanded the overall line to address the different needs of different runners. Said Craig Heisner, Newton’s president, “The goal in 2015 is to take this blueprint and momentum that it’s creating in the marketplace and build on it.”



From top to bottom:
Newton Running Distance,
Distance S, Gravity and Motion

Four core styles – the Distance and Distance S in the speed trainer category and the Gravity and Motion in the mileage-trainer category – will undergo updates with a focus on “providing a design architecture and a point of view and ride that we believe is unlike anything else that’s out there in the marketplace,” he said. A big focus will continue to leverage its five-lug Action/Reaction system that enables Newton to tune the running experience for each runner. A new upper design will also incorporate more stretch materials that better conforms the shoe to the foot.

Newton’s first quarter “was the best quarter in our history” on the success of its +ONE technology. The brand’s complementary goal will be building awareness and simplifying its overall messaging that a runner can “just put Newtons on and go run.”

Newton has no plans to address the maximalism trend. Heisner noted that Newton has more cushioning than other maximalist shoes in the market. But he said many runners are embracing Newton’s message around running efficiency.

“Obviously there’s a perception around what a thick midsole shoe offers versus one that is going to be positioned more toward the idea of communicating with the ground, which is where we are,” said Heisner. “But we have a dynamic technology that encourages flexible movement and we think is the best cushioning out there. It just happens to be incredibly responsive as well.”

Dave Jewell, footwear category manager, **Zoot Sports** said both minimalism and maximalism accentuates the importance of a shoe’s platform and the tri-specialist is translating the knowledge on a shoe-by-shoe basis. An example is the Solana, a neutral trainer featuring BareFit, Zoot’s premium fit system, which provides a seamless internal fit for comfort and the brand’s proprietary injected ZVA for shock absorption and a lightweight ride.



Zoot Solana

“We are using learnings in the market with what feels good but applying a sensible approach that makes a shoe easy to translate,” said Jewell. “Our belief is that you should never need to adapt your body to a running shoe. You should be able to feel good fit and feel in the store that translates to a great run.”

For Spring 2015, Zoot enters the maximalism category with the Zoot Del Mar. The midsole construction is 50/50 – top loaded Zbound+ with a ZVA base. Midsole heights are 25/17 (8mm offset), putting a substantial amount of shoe under the foot at a drop that all runners can step into and run with no adjustment period. It also features a 3D molded heel cup and emphasizes constant ground contact construction. Said Jewell, “At no point during the running stride will there be interrupted contact with the road. This creates a smooth, quiet, and supportive ride.”

For Spring 2015, Zoot will introduce a line inspired by the Southern California roots. “California inspires us,” said Jewell. “In California, a good year is measured by how many days you lived out your passion; where it’s not

what you do for a living, but what you live to do. It’s this active lifestyle that motivates us to make running shoes that will let us chase down your dreams and apparel that will let you feel our California rays.”

For Spring 2015, **Karhu** will release its first full-length fulcrum that starts by encapsulating the heel and extending through the length of the shoe to the toe. Karhu's patented fulcrum technology acts like a lever to move the runner forward quickly and efficiently through the gait cycle and onto the next step.



From top to bottom:
Karhu Fast5, Strong5 and Flow Tri

This full-length fulcrum is debuting in two of its premium trainers, the Fast5 (neutral) and the Strong5 (stability). Said Jordan Kinley, Karhu's national sales manager, "These models offer the greatest amount of cushioning and protection for the runner who needs it most, and extending the Fulcrum allows the shoe to provide continuous forward momentum and guidance throughout the entire gait cycle. Combined with a new softer midsole, these models deliver our most plush ride to date."

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the Flow Tri, Karhu's most lightweight and responsive model, gets an update. Also supported by fulcrum technology, the Flow Tri features a near seamless upper, easy pull heel tab, quick lacing system and Velcro closure to guarantee a customizable fit and quick time in the transition zone.

Since relaunching in the U.S. in 2009, Karhu has been steadily growing in the region with a focus on specialty retail. "We've remained consistent with our message of efficiency and our utilization of the fulcrum technology while at the same time responding to consumers' needs with updates such as a slightly lower drop (8-10mm down from the standard 12-14mm) and softer midsole durometers," said Kinley. "Internationally, Karhu just opened its first retail location in May in its native Helsinki to much fanfare. We're currently in the planning stages for our global 100th anniversary celebration in 2016."



ToPo Athletic Fli-Lyte

For Spring 2015, **ToPo Athletic** will launch its Fli-Lyte road shoe for long-distance running. The Fli-Lyte features a 22mm stack height with a 3mm drop and offers its unique fit that allows toes to spread yet keeps the heel and waist secure. Said Tony Post, CEO "Our increased stack height demonstrates our commitment to offering athletes a range of platforms to support a variety of workouts and environments."

Post admitted that when ToPo launched almost a year ago, people loved the fit, the neutral platform, and the lightweight, but were turned off by the split-toe design. The response to switch to closed-toe shoes "has been fantastic." Its split-toe was recently named shoe of the year by Minimalist Shoes and Gear, and its upcoming Santé fitness training shoe was named the 2014/15 Gold Medal winner by ISPO in the performance footwear category. In-store events and demos continue to show that people still love ToPo's fit. Added Post, "They also comment on the weight and quality of product."

Despite the industry current against more minimal footwear, Post believes minimalism helped runners become much more in-tune with their form, increasing strength and mobility, and taking a more holistic approach to running.

"Minimal footwear still plays an important role in many athletes' training whether it is to improve form, stimulate the muscles in the feet and lower legs, or just to strengthen proprioception," said Post. "And there are still folks that just like the feedback and sensation they get in more minimal shoes. For all of these reasons, we expect minimal footwear will always have a place in the market."



Adidas Supernova
Sequence Boost

Adidas continues to gain a 'boost' in running with the success of its Boost cushioning, which uses thousands of energy capsules for an energy return that Adidas believes exceeds any other foam cushioning material available. That was followed last year by a strong response to Springblade, which features "Energy Blades" to create an ultra-responsive experience for runners.

"These two platforms give us the unique ability to hit both the high school athlete and the young urban runner via the mall and sporting goods," said Chris Brewer, running specialty category manager for Adidas America.

Ongoing Boost introductions continue to expand Adidas' running business. The Supernova Sequence Boost is believed to be one of the most stable running shoes on the market today. The

model features a full length Stableframe, which guides the foot throughout the foot strike. The Adidas Torsion System allows the shoe to adapt to any surface on landing to ensure midfoot support in the plant and push-off phases. It also features an engineered mesh upper and a full heel-to-toe continental rubber outsole.

Brewer believes the concept of maximalism remains a “small niche” in the market, but “the real trend is maximum cushioning, not giant midsoles.” With the shift away from minimalism, the momentum is behind traditional shoes in traditional categories built in smarter ways.

“Better ways to build product will rule the day, like better mesh applications, from knitted to four-way stretch to engineered mesh,” said Brewer. “It’s all about premium applications that have intuitive value. Hard to do, but things like Boost and Primeknit give us a unique positioning to the running consumer.”

For Spring 2015, Adidas will launch the Ultra Boost, which Brewer said “will be the top-of-the-line Boost model for 2015 and will have four stand-out features to separate it from the competition.”

For Spring 2015 from **Altra**, major updates include the Provision 2, its moderate-stability shoe that features a 2mm full-length Varus Stability Wedge built into the midsole to go along with its new Stabilipod technology which enhances the three natural stability zones of the foot by introducing widened midsole pillars in those areas. Along with Altra’s foot-shaped toebox, the Provision 2 allows for a natural running technique in a stability shoe “while allowing the foot to splay and displace impact, stabilize, and push off the ground powerfully,” said Harper.

The Instinct 3, its heritage shoe, has been updated with a more secure fit and stable, responsive ride. The Torin 2 update adds a touch of cushioning along with a wider, stable platform and more room in the toebox.

Harper said Altra’s heritage shoes continue to sell well while Altra’s

two max cushioned shoes launched this year – the Paradigm Road and Olympus Road/Trail Crossover – have done “extremely well.” Added Harper, “Our marriage of max cushioning with natural features like a foot-shaped toebox



Altra One Squared

and consistent cushioning from heel-to-forefoot has been a huge hit for much of our crowd, especially the ultra runners.”

Another new shoe seeing “a ton of success” is the One Squared, which is 24mm thick and weighs in 5.9 ounces, which Harper believes could be one of the highest cushion-to-weight ratio shoes on the market.

“We still believe the sweet spot for running consumers is exactly what we thought it was when we started Altra, shoes that have enough cushioning to work well for long mileage, while still being as natural as possible,” said Harper. “Promoting proper foot and body alignment as well as good running form don’t have to come at the expense of wearing a non-cushioned shoe.”

Pearl Izumi for Spring 2015 is building on the introduction of Project E:Motion in 2013 that promised to deliver the “smoothest running experience possible,” Pearl Izumi for Spring 2015 is introducing five new styles for men and women: EM Road N 1, EM Road N 2, EM Road M 2, EM Tri N 1 and EM Tri N 2. The focus for the launch will be the new EM Road N 2, its top-selling style sitting in the neutral training shoe category.

The EM Road N 2 features Pearl Izumi’s new 3-D seamless print upper technology that adds lightweight structure and upper integrity with less wasted materials while also offering unlimited opportunity for textures,



Pearl Izumi
EM Road N 2

layers and colors, according to Mike Thompson, product line manager for run apparel and footwear.

A new dynamic offset midsole provides a softer midsole unit (9 percent softer in heel and 10 percent higher energy return versus previous models); a wider platform for increased stability; and 10 percent more flexibility with more forefoot segmentation. A new outsole pattern also provides better traction/grip on wet surfaces.

The Project E:Motion launch has led to “solid growth” in the SRA channel in the past 18 months while also earning the brand several product awards from running magazines.

Thompson believes the buzz of maximalism will wear off in 2015/16 and Pearl Izumi is well positioned in the “sweet spot” between the two trends.

“When we introduced our new Spring 2013 Project E:Motion line, we delivered a full range of road, trail and triathlon performance footwear under 10 ounces by having the discipline to know when to stop adding ‘stuff’ to our footwear,” said Thompson. “By taking the best of both footwear trends -minimalism and maximalism, we are able to deliver lightweight, performance footwear that still has plenty of cushioning, comfort and a great fit without compromises.”



ON Cloudster

The Swiss running brand **On** is introducing the re-engineered Cloudster in the neutral category for Spring 2015. While continuing to provide superior cushioning, the upper adds a new Adaptive-Fit concept with 4Way-Stretch fabric adjusting to the foot in all dimensions for an enhanced fit. Toes splay out easily to benefit from the natural cushioning capabilities of the feet and to allow a stable stance for push-off.

The shoe continues to feature the brand’s CloudTec sole that combines a soft landing with a firm push-off. Co-founder David Allemann said the ongoing shift shows that minimalist shoes were not offering enough protection for the average runner. On the other hand, he believes “maximalist instead would be the other extreme and does not seem to be a sustainable solution.”

A strong response this year to the Cloud, its lightest model ever, again left runners impressed with On's ability to deliver a lightweight package with superior cushioning and comfort.

"It allows the runner to land soft (maximalist) and push-off hard (minimalist)," said Allemann. "On combines the best of both worlds in a unique technology that only cushions upon landing and then becomes firm for a natural transition and a powerful push-off. The result is a soft, light yet very agile run."

In the past 18 months, On has quickly expanded its presence in the U.S. from 60 to 250 dealers, including key Running Specialty Group doors, Fleet Feet and Fit2Run. The growth has been supported by the opening of its first U.S. headquarters in Portland, OR last spring as well as a new arrangement that makes Far West Associates its rep firm out west.

At **Reebok**, a key launch for Spring 2015 is the next generation of its successful Z Series platform - the ZQuick Dash. The midsole thickness has been beefed up and the sockliner has been upgraded, both of which are designed to provide more protection and cushioning. The heel crash pad is decoupled more to smooth ground forces at impact and the toe-off zone has been stabilized for better propulsion. On the upper, Reebok's Nanoweb technology provides locked in fit in a lightweight and seamless form.



Reebok ZQuick Dash

Ted Fitzpatrick, Reebok's director of product marketing for running footwear, said the updated Z Series "remains lightweight and continues to provide increased ground contact for more control and cut groove geometry for a quick release to help you get there faster." The Z series launched in February with healthy sell-throughs at Reebok's sporting goods and mall partners.

Building on recent successes such as RealFlex and ZigTech, Reebok is promising further innovation stories in Spring 2015 although it's keeping them under wraps for now. Reebok expects to capitalize on what Fitzpatrick sees "as more interest in less-traditional silhouettes and casual-first running looks." It's also positioned well around the shift to cushioning and thicker midsoles because Reebok never swung too far to minimal.

"Superior feel in-store and during the run remain key requirements for all our products," said Fitzpatrick. "Consumers continue to tell us that Reebok running footwear is great because it offers technology you can see and feel. A great example of this is our Z Series product range that delivers a natural feel and lightweight product with cushioning equal to a traditional high mileage running shoe."



Meb Keflezighi became the first American to win the Boston Marathon this year since 1983. Photo courtesy Skechers

Rick Higgins, VP of merchandising and marketing for **Skechers** Performance division, said new account sign-ups shot up immediately after its star men's runner Meb Keflezighi became the first American to win the Boston Marathon this year since 1983. Said Higgins, "It caused all those who had been on the fence to climb over."

Another win for its run push was the signing in May of Kara Goucher, a top American female distance runner over the past decade, to support its efforts to reach women runners. But Higgins knows that its success comes down to runners enjoying the benefits of Skechers' M-Strike technology, which fosters a mid-foot strike technology, as well as its Resalyte cushioning and GOimpulse sensors for enhanced sensory feedback.



Skechers GOMeb Speed 3

Among its upcoming releases, Skechers will release the GOMeb Strada, a more-cushioned shoe that offers "passive stability." The GORun 4 shifts to a two-piece midsole over a one-piece for a more responsive ride and overall has less of a rocker affect than the original GORun but the focus remains on the midfoot strike. A GOMeb Speed 3 with new tooling, updated aesthetics and a roomer toebox also to build on the popularity of Keflezighi.

Skora will launch a cushioned road shoe next Spring. Said David Sypniewski, CEO of Skora, "We're combining the features our customers love, such as a fully-rounded outsole and anatomical fit, and crafting the next generation trainer. A balanced cushioning approach with amazing breathability, it's going to be a tremendous addition to our line."

Skora, which launched in 2012, promotes natural running form and a midfoot strike because of its 0mm heel-to-toe drop. Despite coming to market riding the minimalist craze, the brand continues to grow at over 110 percent per year with gains overseas and in the U.S. Says Sypniewski, "As we continue to expand our product offerings, we continue to stay true to our design philosophy, removing the unnecessary and offering a premium product; it's what runners deserve." He sees the market settling into what he calls a "neutral-minimal" positioning, a neutral-minimal hybrid.



Skora FIT

"It's all about finding balance," said Sypniewski. "Barefoot shoes' were too extreme, as is the new 'maximalism' fad. The athletic footwear market is forever changed, offering more low profile and lighter footwear. These are all good things. I think we'll see continued developments in materials and a return to better fit and quality."

Spira Footwear - best known for its WaveSpring technology featuring three re-engineered springs embedded under the heel and toe - is introducing shoes with new seamless uppers and lighter weight for Spring 2015. A focus is also on improving colors and materials.

"Spira's technology seems to fit with whatever trend is out there," said Andy Krafzur, Spira's CEO. "Our mechanical midsole provides the best cushioning and energy return on the market, and is super lightweight and responsive."

Spira was founded by 2001 well before the minimal craze and continues to slowly draw a committed pack of runners to the benefits of its unique technology. Krafzur pointed to an outside study from the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology that showed running shoes with integrated Mechanical Springs technology may have the benefit of lower oxygen cost for running at a submaximal effort while offering the injury reduction benefit of cushioning. The research suggests the WaveSpring leads to about six minutes improvement in a marathon for the average runner with the same amount of effort over traditional footwear, estimates Krafzur considers "conservative."

"Practically speaking, we believe we're the Holy Grail," said Krafzur. "Can't quite figure why the rest of the industry has yet to fully catch on, but the consumer is finding us somehow." ■

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THE FUTURE OF RUNNING CONTINUES TO LOOK BRIGHT

Color has taken over the running industry within the past several years; and while many vendors see a toning down and a cleaner approach than past years, bright colors aren't expected to go away for Spring 2015.

By Thomas J. Ryan

“Colors are still in, but there is also a return to basic, single tone colors,” said Skora Founder David Sypniewski. “New materials and patterns are going to make a debut next year as well.”

“Colors are becoming sophisticated again,” added Chris Brewer, running specialty category manager for Adidas America. “Simple designs deserve clean and premium color placements. We see this as a longer-term trend. Of course, we will monitor this as we go, but it seems to be happening slowly, but surely, and we don’t see it suddenly slowing down.”

Patrick O’Malley, Saucony’s SVP of global product, believes bright colors remain “extremely relevant” but he sees a greater emphasis on more-subtle color pops than wild all-over color.

“A couple of years ago you could throw any color on a shoe. It could be really aggressive,” noted O’Malley. “Now we’re back to using colors that complement each other rather than contrasting.”

Saucony also wants its shoes to look “light and fast,” using flowing lines that pull towards to the forefoot to make the shoe appear as if they’re “in motion when they’re on the shelf.” Designs are also meant to be “functional” and to help support each model’s performance attributes “so that when a consumer goes up to the wall, they say ‘That design makes sense.’”

As far as specific colors, citron has become a core color for men and women. Twilight, a bluish, purple color, is also clicking with both genders. Said O’Malley, “On the men’s side, you’re able to push the boundaries.”

Golden Harper, founder of Altra, strongly suspects a toning down of colors for Spring 2015.

“Colors are going pretty dark and moody for 2015,” observed Harper. “Our aesthetics are being driven by ways to highlight our technologies, as well as materials and lightweight overlays that are still strong. This allows the product to be light without compromising durability, while making for a more sleek and more polished looking product.”

Tony Post, CEO of ToPo Athletic, said color has become “much more sophisticated,” especially in the women’s market. He added, “It’s clear that consumers aren’t shying away from bright, rich hues and unconventional color pairings, but the market has moved toward more sophisticated, tasteful uses of color pop. We’ve used this as an opportunity to experiment with printing and color blocking as a way to deliver on this trend.”

But Doug Smiley, business unit manager, footwear, Mizuno USA, said color remains

unquestionably part of Mizuno’s equation in telling a larger brand story and connecting with consumers.

“In Spring 2015, the bold colors will still be very relevant,” noted Smiley. “There are plenty of bold and confident options and their pairings, while unexpected, will give the lineup a very dynamic look. You will also see a resurgence of classic ‘athletic’ colors like red and blue applied through a modern lens. There’s more saturation and depth to these colors, and they give off a sense of sport and heritage.”

Claire Wood, senior product manager for performance running, New Balance, also believes that while more tonal shifts may be coming, color is not going away. The brand now goes to market with several colors in each style, tuned to the different tastes among runners.

“This industry is not black or white, so shoes never will be,” said Wood. “Having fresh, fun exciting colors for the youthful runner, as well as material innovation that can take color application in unique ways is an area we have an entire team dedicated to.”

Kira Harrison, Brooks’ footwear merchandising associate, said that to kick-off Spring 2015, Brooks’ color team did an insights trip around the U.S., visiting key running markets in each region of the country. Two key takeaways from the trip were that runners believe running “should be fun and color is a great way to excite people to go run.” Secondly, people have an “emotional connection” to color and view color as a personal expression.

“The main emphasis this season is on ‘true’ colors,” said Harrison. “We are seeing the trends move away from the artificial world of neon and celebrating true colors that are still very vibrant and rich. We use trend relevant colors to create a seasonal point of view and freshness to the line. We combine these with our classic sport palette which is made up of colors that are always relevant to running and to running and Brooks.”

Beyond colors, blocking also plays a huge role in the overall look of the shoe and will be emphasized by Brooks in Spring 2015. The three trends that rose to the top were monochromatic, split blocking and fades. Said Harrison, “This season, we continue to use prints in our line and for the first time we have an all-over print on the PureConnect. The use of all-over prints has been seen more in categories such as cross-training and we want to bring this energy to the running world.”

Karhu, reflecting its Scandinavian heritage, will continue to play up vibrant colors for Spring 2015.

“Bright, mid-range uses of cobalt blue and green

are seen throughout,” said Jordan Kinley, Karhu’s national sales manager. “Depth is added through use of complimentary accents of titanium blue and granite. We are telling a similar story of depth and color through the use of a vibrant blue/green with accents of coral and sea glass. We are also adding depth through layering of air mesh, and textured synthetics in satin and matte finish.”

Zoot, a brand long known for its strong use of color, plans to continue to push the limits in 2015 with an even-bigger emphasis on the California culture and related colors.

On’s Co-founder David Allemann said that from the beginning, On has introduced a brand aesthetic that is more minimal in form yet bolder in colors. The brand avoids any applications and decoration in the upper shoe that is not focused on functionality. He added, “This leads to a sleek minimal form factor that is optimized for performance. On brings in the fun through color and clearly departs from the dull color schemes runners were used to in the past. On can be fast, fun and fashionable at the same time.”

Pearl Izumi will introduce women’s-specific upper designs on all of its new Spring 2015 styles.

“The female consumer represents over 55 percent of the footwear units sold at SRA and they are currently left with one option in the market by all brands – a men’s upper design on a women’s last with women’s colors,” said Mike Thompson, Pearl Izumi’s product line manager for run apparel and footwear.

The designs will feature softer, more flowing lines versus men’s and a smaller, subtle logo on the quarter after research showed that a majority of women do not like oversized logos on the ‘unisex’ upper designs. For color, Pearl Izumi, like other companies, will replace some of its neons and fluorescents with “more toned down colors that are deep and saturated.”

When Newton Running was launched in 1996, it stood out for its vibrant colors and has no plans to shift - with many of its competitors also embracing a vibrant color palette. One subtle shift is using mid-range colors for a more mainstream appeal but “it will always be a secondary color for us,” said Craig Heisner, president of Newton Running.

From a design point of view, Newton continues to believe that it stands out for its minimal approach that removes any “superfluous extras” from the shoe. Said Heisner, “We make running shoes first to run in. We know it’s a fashion business, too. But anything that is added on our shoe is added to support the athlete running.” ■

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- 15-17 ASI Chicago
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- 18-20 A.D.A. Spring Show
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AUGUST

- 6-9 Outdoor Retailer Summer Market
Salt Lake City, UT
- 14-16 Sports Inc. Outdoor Show
Nashville, TN
- 24 Tennis Industry Association
The Tennis Show
New York, NY

SEPTEMBER

- 3-8 NBS Fall Semi - Annual Market
Fort Worth, TX
- 4-6 Imprinted Sportswear Show (ISS)
Orlando, FL

- 10-12 Interbike International Trade Expo
Las Vegas, NV
- 16-17 SFIA Industry Leaders Summit
Chicago, IL

OCTOBER

- 7-9 OIA Rendezvous
Asheville, NC

NOVEMBER

- 3-5 NBS Fall Athletic Market
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- 15-16 A.D.A. Fall Show
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- 23-25 Sports, Inc. Fall Team Dealer Show
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