

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

CFDA CEO Steven Kolb on the future of fashion and Fashion Week

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Steven Kolb is CEO of the Council of Fashion Designers of America. Photo by Jonathan Meizler

By [Daniel Hodges](#)

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The Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) is a nonprofit trade association founded in 1962 whose membership comprises more than 500 of the United States' foremost womenswear, menswear, jewelry and accessory designers.

Steven Kolb, as CEO of the Council of Fashion Designers of America, sees first-hand the dynamic and changing fashion industry, steering the organization's mission "to strengthen the impact of American fashion in the global economy."

CFDA board members include chairman Diane von Furstenberg, who first entered the fashion world in 1972 with a suitcase full of jersey dresses and was named the most powerful woman in fashion by Forbes Magazine, as well as Michael Kors, Marcus Wainwright, Vera Wang and Mimi.

Under Mr. Kolb's leadership, the fashion industry is positioned as an engine for growth in the U.S. and around the world. The Boston Consulting Group estimated that the apparel and footwear segment in 2016 alone generated more than \$1 trillion in revenue and employs 60 million-plus people globally.

In this interview, Mr. Kolb discusses the evolving role of Fashion Week, shifting consumer behavior, technology's effect on the business and challenges facing designers. Please read on:

How has the role of Fashion Week changed since the 2016 BCG/CFGA report on Fashion Week?

The [Council of Fashion Designers of America Inc.](#) and the Boston Consulting Group report, "The Future of Fashion Week," gave designers a license to experiment with marketing and shows, allowing them to break from traditional formats and to experiment with new ideas.

Diane von Furstenberg, chairman of the CFDA, said "The responsibility of the CFDA is to provide information to help designers decide what is right for them, alleviate the pressure and give them the freedom to allocate their resources in a way that is best for them."

How are changes in technology and in consumer behavior impacting Fashion Week?

Consumers are very active with online and direct-to-consumer shopping and this has caused traditional bricks-and-mortar retailers to rethink their approach.

Also, content is king, with all brands directly communicating with customers via their own digital channels and, in many cases, bypassing traditional media.

The BCG/CFDA report discussed the role of buy-now, wear now consumer behavior as a trend. How has that developed since the 2016?

It's still very relevant for some brands and not right for others. Brands more in control of their supply chain and distribution have greater success. Tommy Hilfiger is an example of a brand that has had amazing success.

How are designers staying on top of the rapidly changing consumer behaviors, trends and technologies?

The CFDA provides professional education for designers on industry topics from doing business in China, on demand manufacturing, the plus size market and other topics that help them stay on top of trends.

What are the biggest challenges facing designers today?

Consumers have their own front seat on their phones. Every brand has their own active social media sharing images and media right from their shows.

Designers will invite top customers to show as well and there are countless digital media outlets covering Fashion Week. Designers are most challenged by the supply chain and changing distribution channels.

How is the CFDA developing talent for the industry and working with Fashion Week?

We have a number of programs that identify young talent. These programs offer business development and mentoring and include the Elaine Gold Launch Pad and the CFDA Vogue Fashion Fund.

Does the CFDA work with industries outside the fashion industry to co-develop ideas and stay on top of marketplace trends?

We work with many industries outside of fashion, many in partnerships.

Cadillac is our partner on Retail Lab. We have worked with Google on diversity programming. Consumer products as well like LIFEWTR, which supports emerging design talent. DHL co-authored a supply chain study with us and Accenture advises on retail trends. Those are just a few.

How has the CFDA Fashion Award show changed over the last three years?

It's become more accessible to the public via our Facebook Live broadcast. This year almost 4 million people watched the show.

We added the Swarovski Award for Positive Change in 2017, with Kenneth Cole and Diane von Furstenberg being the first two recipients.

What other U.S. cities apart from New York have developed fashion weeks or have developed Fashion Week-type events?

New York remains the U.S. fashion capital, but you see active fashion communities in Los Angeles, Miami, St. Louis, Detroit and Nashville, among others, with each having a local perspective with their work.

Much of it is not based around Fashion Weeks with LA being the most developed.



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