

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

## S-word overused, but misunderstood in luxury fashion

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*Label Mara Hoffman uses responsibly sourced organic, recycled and regenerated materials whenever possible. Image credit: Mara Hoffman*

By SARAH RAMIREZ

NEW YORK Luxury brands are becoming more aware of how sustainable practices impact their businesses, but they are not necessarily adept at incorporating environmentally-friendly processes on a wider scale.

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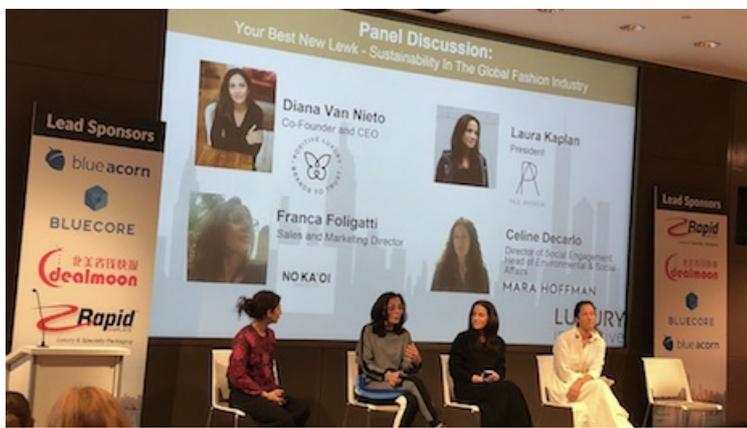
In a Luxury Interactive panel discussion, "Your Best New Look: Sustainability in the Global Fashion Industry," moderated by **Positive Luxury** co-founder and CEO Diana Verde Nieto, executives from sustainable, high-end fashion brands explained how their organizations have embraced social responsibility.

"There's been a huge shift even in the semantics of the s-word," said Cline Decarlo, director of social engagement and company culture at **Mara Hoffman**. "It's become this sexy term, but what does that look like in terms of usability?"

### Sustainability integration

Forward-thinking fashion labels are making sustainability part of their everyday routines and emphasizing transparency as well.

Socially responsible tactics include use of non-toxic materials, buying back leftover textiles and even supporting workers' unionization efforts, as is the case for high-end activewear brand No Ka 'Oi. Footwear brand Paul Andrew focuses on made-to-order and womenswear label Mara Hoffman encourages its customers to "wear more, buy less."



*From left to right: Diana Verde Nieto, Franca Foligatti, Laura Kaplan and Cline Decarlo*

Sustainability is about more than responsibly-sourced materials and streamlined supply chains, and many companies have a social justice approach as well.

Many sustainable-oriented labels also partner with local and global organizations that support women's empowerment efforts. Labels are finding ways to support the marginalized communities that are risk of being first impacted by the climate crisis.



*Paul Andrew's eponymous founder is also women's creative director at Salvatore Ferragamo. Image credit: Paul Andrew*

Sharing these efforts through social media or events is an important way for brands to connect to socially-conscious shoppers. As younger consumers' purchasing power builds, so does their tendency to demand more from brands through public platforms.

"Sustainability is no longer product-centric. It's consumer-centric," said Laura Kaplan, president of **Paul Andrew**. "You need to have a story behind it, a human touch and interaction to really drive it forward."

#### Consumer demands

As consumers become more aware of environmental issues, they are expecting more transparency and initiatives from luxury brands.

According to the Responsible Luxury Initiative, companies should protect resources by using less and recycling more, using business strategies and philanthropic efforts to positively benefit society and being transparent about their progress to engage more investors and consumers.

Luxury fashion brands are encouraged to invest in the protection and restoration of crucial ecosystems. This will help keep raw materials, such as wool, leather and cotton, available for those same luxury retailers.

High-end brands can also use their influence to promote the development of more innovative and sustainable materials ([see story](#)).

In particular, millennials expect brands to be more value-conscious. A report from Morning Consult finds that honesty, quality and customer service are among the most important brand traits for millennials to drive loyalty.

The five most important values to millennials are honesty, reliability, helping family, compassion and commitment. Millennials take into consideration how companies treat their own employees. Fifty-one percent say that they prefer

a company if it pays employees well, while 40 percent say they like a company more if it is considered a place people enjoy working ([see story](#)).

"Millennials and Gen Z expect accountability from companies and brands and communicate their demands on social media," Mara Hoffman's Ms. Decarlo said. "Brands must engage."

### **1 thought on “S-word overused, but misunderstood in luxury fashion”**

1. Good says:

[October 25, 2018 at 6:16 am](#)

Well, for example (and I know, because I've been in the fashion business, trying to produce sustainable products) that much or all of what is spouted is lies. All. Out. Lies. I am personally disgusted by the extent of wastage from the fashion industry. As a (very) white person, I could go on about how this wastage is trotted out to 3rd World countries, but rather think it would make black people hate me more than they already do.

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