

FINDING THE RIGHT PERSON FOR THE JOB

By JANET GROEBER

Jaimee Marshall likes to say she was recruited by a recruiter to become a recruiter, but it's also a career route the retail veteran believes she was meant to take.

With a diverse background in publishing, fashion and retail brands and a talent for problem solving, Marshall was recruited to help others connect the best people to the best positions. She joined executive search firm Kirk Palmer Associates in 2006, specializing in luxury retail talent.

Marshall's retail career started in 1985 at Escada, where she rose through the ranks to become vice president of operations in 1991 and vice president of marketing in 1993. In 1997, Marshall left to launch a consulting practice where she helped companies including leading international and domestic luxury brands make strategic and operational changes in their businesses.

In 2001, *Women's Wear Daily* publisher Fairchild Publications hired Marshall to become general manager of Fairchild Internet and launch wwd.com. She also worked on several strategic projects for Fairchild, including its CEO Summits and others related to best practices in talent management.

Give us a snapshot of the fashion retail industry. Who and what's hot, and which retail formats are not?

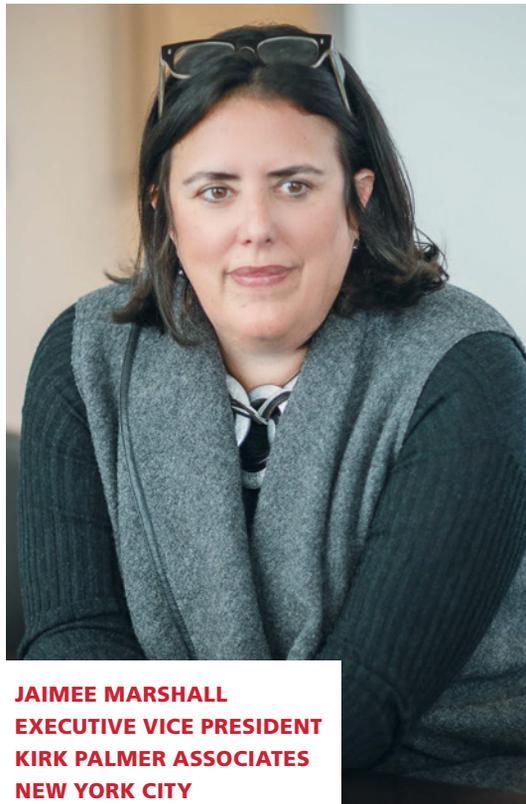
While everyone knows the really big search firms, Kirk Palmer Associates is a boutique firm with 30 years in business. Our start and our roots are in finding fashion merchants, and on average 40 to 50 percent of our search assignments are looking for merchants.

From our perspective, we're always seeing movement in chief merchants, chief marketing officers and heads of store/retail positions. With that said, traditional bricks-and-mortar apparel retail roles are less attractive today than they have been, and the competition for top talent is strong.

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Can you help us understand how the retail industry is changing in the C-suite?

These days, there seem to be fewer senior level retail jobs to be filled. The reason has to do with both the consolidation of retail companies and the growing interest in leveraging teams across businesses [that] is weakening demand



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for hiring outside. In its place, we see multi-divisional companies hoping to provide leadership to departments or teams creating “centers of excellence.”

In spite of that trend, Jet.com and Dollar Shave Club are two examples of innovative companies that continue to emerge and provide new career paths for executives.

Is that affecting remuneration?

Salary levels have always varied depending on sector, role and other considerations, and now is no different. Retail can still be lucrative, particularly at the more senior levels where compensation is typically a combination of base, target bonus and some type of equity. The more senior the role, the more equity becomes a key component.

Quality-of-life perks like flexible work schedules, time off, paid gym and lunch are nice to have and do appeal to younger candidates, but at the senior level these are less important.

How are retailers responding to these newer realities with respect to benefits and compensation?

The biggest challenge we encounter is when there isn't parity between an outside candidate and other similar-level internal candidates, particularly a candidate who has worked in a larger firm with bigger volumes for a more senior role in a smaller business. Even though volumes are smaller, in order to get a candidate to make a change, it's often necessary to give them at least a 10- to 20-percent increase in compensation.

Companies must make it attractive for a candidate to make a move. The surest way to be successful is through compensation. It's also often difficult to find candidates willing to relocate to certain cities or areas of the country, so that's a lifestyle issue that has nothing to do with the position. Rather, we are seeing that it's a disconnect between expectations and reality. Employers often come to us when they've exhausted their own resources, and we try to be the independent thought partner and help employers manage their expectations.

What are the most difficult positions to fill? Why?

I can give you four, beginning with the chief executive officer. Every company wants the perfect blend of skills, experience and, of course, a successful track record. There is more demand than supply for chief executive officers and

companies need to be willing to bring ascendancy candidates into the CEO role.

We also see the chief marketing officer role has changed so much, and it can be difficult to find leaders with a necessary balance of both online experience mixed with more traditional skills. Chief digital officer is also difficult because the role is in such high demand, and the role of the chief merchant for an apparel company is difficult because it is challenging to find candidates that bring a consistent track record of success.

How can those job seekers better their chances for new opportunities?

Above all, it's important that everyone today be conversant in ecommerce and online content if they want to be marketable. If they don't have a working knowledge, they need to get up to speed — and fast. Companies are also looking for international, profit and loss and multi-departmental or sector experience, as well as those who have worked with winning brands known for top talent. A successful stint at a more entrepreneurial venture can also be attractive.

There is lots of talk about the Millennial cohort these days, but we have a new generation quickly coming of age. What's your advice for employers hoping to catch their attention?

Younger candidates are more interested in mission-based businesses. They want to connect emotionally to the opportunity and understand the company's story. They're also looking for companies that bring a strong technology component as well as an attractive work culture that is fun, collaborative and often flexible.

What about so-called “older” workers? Do they still have a place in the corporate retail workforce?

There's still a lot of openness for tried-and-true general manager and chief executive officer candidates. Executives today are often not as well-rounded, and that can be [detrimental] to their viability for general manager and chief executive officer roles. With that in mind, it's beholden on older candidates to stay relevant. That means, for example, being current on new brands, web and mobile business requirements and new distribution concepts. **STORES**

Janet Groeber has covered all aspects of the retail industry for more than 20 years. Her reporting has appeared in AdWeek and DDI Magazine, among others.