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Design a wearable that consumers actually want to be seen wearing.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM WEAR CONFERENCE

1. **Design a wearable that consumers actually want to be seen wearing.** Makers of wearables must design products that people actually want to buy; the devices need to provide valuable data, but not feel like technology—because no one wants to look like an android.
2. **Data is king, but turning it into relevant, usable insights is still a challenge.** No one cares about “step counting” in a vacuum, so there must be a deeper reason for consumers to buy wearable tech, and companies should recognize and take advantage of that information.
3. **Technology means different things to different people.** Brands should not create a rigid platform that is limited to what they think it should do. More flexible technologies provide more value over time to users as their desires and needs evolve.

Technology means different things to different people.



Source: Cognizant/Fung Global Retail & Technology

SESSION SUMMARIES

The Fung Global Retail & Technology team attended the WEAR 2016 conference in Boston last week. The event’s organizers describe it as a forum for “cutting-edge commercial and technical presentations from the best and brightest in the wearable tech, smart textiles, healthcare technology, material innovation and consumer experience fields.”

EVENT

On the first day of the conference, we heard from Theo Forbath, Global VP of Digital Transformation at Cognizant, who gave a keynote speech titled “The Revolution Will Be Digitized.” Forbath shared his insights on the changing tech arena, noting that we are moving from a world of “things” to a world of “smart programmable things” that are constantly monitoring us and our behavior. Forbath said that the data collected will drive what he calls “radical transformation.”

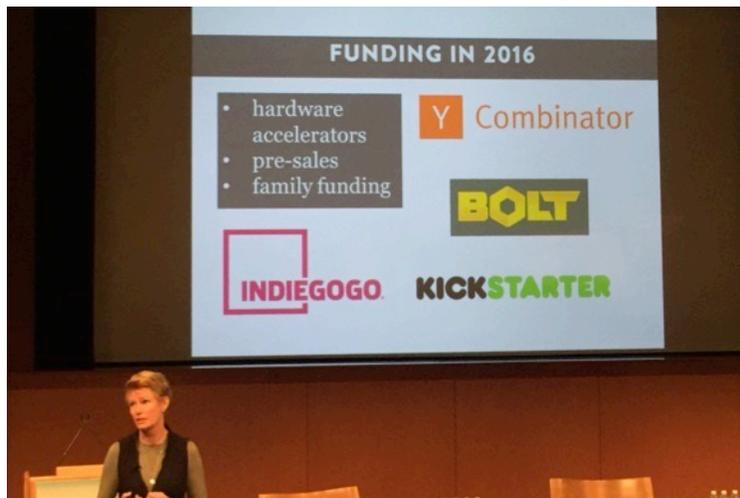
The era of personalization is upon us, Forbath said, and manufacturers are getting on board, creating all kinds of opportunities to commercialize the computing experience, whether through smart fabrics, computers hidden in buttons or personalized computer interfaces. Companies such as Under Armour are particularly aware of this transformation, Forbath noted. The company employs over 500 people who focus specifically on digital innovation and data collection.

The “connecting tissue” for the new frontier of wearables, smart textiles, and connected cities and homes is data, and data is becoming increasingly personal, Forbath said. Leveraging this personal data is going to become a crucial differentiator as companies begin to design new wearable experiences. Thus, innovators need to follow three key principles: deliver value, give users control over their data and educate them on what to do with their data. Finding meaning within the data is what allows consumers to engage fully, and the subsequent trust that is built is what will give companies a competitive advantage, he concluded.

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Source: The Grommet/Fung Global Retail & Technology



Jules Pieri, Co-Founder and CEO of The Grommet, gave the day’s second keynote address. Pieri covered 21 years of information in a speech titled “1995–2016: What Has Changed About Product Launch.” She said that when The Grommet started out in the toy industry, the team was frustrated by the system of launching new toys. So, it innovated the launch process, and, since 2008, the

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company has launched a new product every single day. Pieri noted, “When we launch a product, we are getting into one out of 50 households in the US, so, within an hour of launch, we know exactly what Americans think of a previously unknown product.

Overall, almost all aspects of product launch have improved, according to Pieri, including design, research, funding, retail, distribution and payment. The most important and complex part of launching products is now marketing, she noted, due to the numerous different channels involved, all of which have varying levels of complexity and reach different audiences.

Later in the day, representatives from Google and Levi Strauss gave a presentation on their Project Jacquard partnership, which has made it possible to weave touch and gesture interactivity into any textile using standard, industrial looms. For example, a jacket that has been designed for cyclist commuters can be programmed to provide specific functionality that meets that group’s needs. Upon launch, the jacket will be able to do basic things such as control music and provide navigation help—through either voice or haptic feedback. The jacket will serve as a platform on which Google is planning to open an API, in order to allow developers to provide additional functionality for it.

The technology woven into the fabric is very durable, as it needs to survive a denim-manufacturing process that includes stretching the fabric, burning it under a flame and washing it multiple times. The collaboration between Google and Levi’s has proven symbiotic—when Levi’s told Google that the denim was burned, the Google team asked what type of fuel was used, so it could figure out the temperature the technology needed to withstand. Levi’s, in turn, was able to provide Google with top yarn designers from Japan, and together, the two companies created an impressive product.



Source: Fung Global Retail & Technology

EVENT

Google plans to work with other brands in the future to create other types of garment solutions. Levi's will continue to support the effort, with the mind-set that the larger the community around this platform, the more successful the end results will be.

On the second day of the conference, we heard from Liza Kindred, Founder of Third Wave Fashion – a company that helps brands integrate cutting-edge technology into their products -- on how to make wearable tech that is actually worth wearing. Kindred noted that there are currently 9 billion connected devices on the planet (more than one for every person living). So, in order to get past all the hype surrounding wearables, there has to be some real value added through technology that the customer will be willing to pay more for. Kindred shared her 11-part formula for building wearable tech:

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1. Less novelty
2. Create utility or joy
3. Build on standards
4. Be open
5. Make it future proof (upgradeable tech)
6. Don't release a prototype as a product
7. Design for context
8. Provide security
9. Build for humans
10. Build to last
11. Narrow the digital divide

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Source: Third Wave Fashion/Fung Global Retail & Technology

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Next, we heard from CuteCircuit Creative Director Francesca Rosella and CEO Ryan Genz, who gave a presentation titled “New Experiences for New Markets: How Haute Couture Translates to Ready-to-Wear Fashion, Sportswear and Workwear.” First and foremost, wearable tech is about connecting people, Rosella said. The presenters noted that CuteCircuit has been working to create an iTunes economy for fashion, where users can download new patterns or smart functionality for their fashion pieces. The idea is that all garments have the same “brain,” so users can simultaneously control all smart clothing.

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Source: CuteCircuit/Fung Global Retail & Technology

In a presentation titled “Weaving Technology into Fashion,” Stephane Marceau, Co-Founder and CEO of OMsignal, said that customers pick fashion over tech, so design should be creators’ primary concern. The challenge, Marceau said, is being able to affordably manufacture garments that have integrated technology.

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Kenji Higashi, Director and Executive Officer of Spiber, then shared his insights on the next generation of industrial materials, particularly proteins. Spiber is trying to mimic nature by engineering materials from proteins that can be used to create fabrics. The idea is that the sustainable materials will be strong enough to be woven and spun as easily as normal materials. There are many potential applications for these fabrics, and the company’s approach is revolutionizing the supply chain by basing it on a biological process as opposed to harvesting natural resources.

In a later presentation, Joel Furey, Chief Commercial Officer of Noble Biomaterials, continued on the same theme as Higashi, noting that wearable technologies will not be viable if they do not look and feel good to the consumer. Noble Biomaterials is working to create a conductive soft surface infrastructure that works to manage odor, prevent infection and monitor the user’s biometrics, Furey said. This could allow users to rewear clothing up to 3.5 times, reducing the need to wash it, and thereby saving water and resources.

EVENT

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In the final presentation we attended on the second day of the conference, Sabine Seymour, Founder and CEO of Moonlab, emphasized the importance of using technology to provide value, while making sure that the technology is hidden. Technology means different things to different people, Seymour said. For example, some consumers might use a UV sensor on their baby while others might use it on their elderly parent. Thus, wearable companies should create technology that is not limited to what they think it should do, but that is flexible enough to be able to provide more value over time to the user.

On the last day of the conference, we attended a presentation from Rosalind Picard, Founder and Director of the Affective Computing Research Group at the MIT Media Lab. She posed the question “What can a wristband tell you about brain health?” and then described her attempts to answer that by using wearables to help people on the autism spectrum interact with the world, and help the world interact with those on the spectrum. She specifically cited a wristband that can measure electrodermal activity, which helps to detect seizures before they happen, alerting both the wearer and the wearer’s caretakers. This type of technology provides real-time, actionable data that directly improves the lives of those with autism.

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