

# NORDSTROM

## Sam Lobban Joins BoF Live on the Future of Buying

March 16, 2021

SVP of Designer and [New Concepts](#), Sam Lobban joined t.a. Founder Telsha Anderson in the BoF Live Conversation around the future of buying in a landscape reshaped by the pandemic.

Throughout the conversation, the notion of creating sense of discovery for customers was said to be critical for buyers. Creating a sense of discovery reflects our commitment to delivering personalized customer experiences and great service. Sam also spoke about our values as it relates to the communities we serve. Through initiatives like New Concepts, we have created space for new diverse brand partnerships, bringing together those perspectives and stories closer to our customers and the communities we serve. Delving into the role of buyers, Sam emphasized the importance of using data to understand customer needs together with his extensive industry expertise.

See highlights from the panel discussion below.

### **Tell us about your buying background and work at Nordstrom.**

I support buying teams across our designer and luxury brands at Nordstrom. I also work on our New Concepts initiative, a space in which we put together creative based product initiatives that center around telling brand and product stories. I started with Nordstrom in 2018 but my start in the industry was on the shop floor of a small menswear boutique. From there I went to Selfridges and worked on the salesfloor and left as the men's designer and contemporary buyer. I joined Mr. Porter in 2011 when they had about 50 brands and when I left, they had a little over 500—it was a great experience building that.

### **How has the role of social media evolved during a pandemic which has halted in-person events?**

There are two notions that have been affected by the pandemic: discovery and buying. The discovery piece shifted years ago with the acceleration of social media—about 10 years ago. The discovery went from, getting a ticket for a fashion show or attending the right tradeshow, to brands creating new digital groundswell while building their communities and audiences through social platforms.

This is something we have spoken about in buying circles and with colleagues for several years now. Brands are creating self-perpetuating demands by directly connecting with an audience which continuously grows. The other side of it—the notion of excitement, buzz, and attention—comes from centered moments like fashion week, which is tough to re-create digitally. Street style has essentially been stopped, and that was a big part of creating an energy around a show.

On the more practical side, we have now bought three seasons digitally and completely remote. However, it doesn't replace being in a room and seeing the clothes in person to get a sense of connection on the fabrication and construction, which is the inspiring emotion of discovery. I for one miss being in a showroom and seeing the product.

### **Nordstrom is a store that sells product at every price point yet, there is attention to the mix of product and delivers a clear personality—how do you balance that product assortment and sense of discovery with managing expectations of what the consumer will buy?**

The key word there is balance. We often talk about relevancy and inspiration and for us to be a relevant retailer we must have the products that people want to buy, in the color and size they want within those specific key items. The business is driven by those key items, and personally, I am a big fan of that because it affords us to take risks on the inspirational end of the scale. It's important to get the right mix of relevant items while focusing on building inspirational narratives with brands that have connected with customers within a community. If you can balance those two things, then there is room and scope to do both.

### **Nordstrom has a brand identity that is important. It's not just about curation, but the values associated with Nordstrom, specifically being a diverse retailer. From a buyer's perspective, how are you thinking about bringing in more voices for diverse selection?**

It's important to us as a company and it's something that we have always believed in—it's also important to our community which includes our people, our employees, and our customers. It's imperative we listen to what our communities are saying.

We have committed to driving \$500M in sales in diverse brands and products by the end of 2025. We are also thinking about initiatives where we can bring in members of the community to put forth their perspective and ideas. We launched [Black Space](#) through New Concepts which is a partnership with five Black creatives who put forth their perspectives in conjunction with the stories they wanted to tell to celebrate Black fashion. We hope to make space for diversity across brands and product offering through the platforms we are building.