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WOMEN IN TECH

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By Dan Berthiaume

Female executives make their mark on the world of retail IT

It's no secret that neither the retail industry nor the technology industry has exactly achieved parity when it comes to granting women access to top-level decision-making positions. According to a report from IIC Partners, 64% of retailers said their senior executive team was less than 25% female — despite the fact that women drive a whopping 85% of all consumer purchases.

Women are famously underrepresented in technology. Looking at technology jobs of all levels, only about 25% are held by women, according to a study from HR&A Advisors. Yet women hold 41% of science and engineering degrees.

However, things are starting to change, even if it's at a slow pace. IIC Partners data show that 57% of retail companies say gender diversity is “very” or at least “somewhat” important, with technology listed as a top-four area where retailers are planning to include more women.

And with technology coming out of the “back room” and being distributed across the organization, including major points of contact with an overwhelmingly female customer base, the inclusive nature of retailers' technology executive teams should only increase.

Fortunately for the growing numbers of women ascending the ladder of retail technology success, some trailblazers

have already led the way and demonstrated how a woman can, in fact, survive and thrive as an executive decision-maker in the world of retail IT. While there are more women with retail technology achievements worthy of recognition than can be included in a single article, *Chain Store Age* selected 10 female retail technology executives who have truly demonstrated leadership, passion and innovation in their field.

Some of these women are technology “lifers,” while others have come to IT from other areas of the business, such as merchandising and supply chain. Some have always worked in retail, while others have backgrounds in such industries as airlines and health care. And they represent a host of retail verticals, including mass merchandise, drug store, direct-to-consumer and apparel, to name a few.

But they all share one thing in common — a track record of success in selecting, implementing and managing technology to benefit their organizations and their customers. And they have done so while overcoming the unique, gender-based challenges facing a female retail technology executive. So read on and learn how smart, capable women handle the issues that a female in the modern workplace must confront, while also overseeing the day-to-day complexities of a large retail technology enterprise.

Karenann Terrell

Executive VP & CIO, Wal-Mart Stores Inc.



Karenann Terrell, who has served as executive VP and CIO of Wal-Mart since December 2010 and previously held the CIO position at international

healthcare company Baxter, is about to have her already busy life become much busier. Since assuming the CIO role at Wal-Mart, Terrell has been responsible for managing the retailer's global technology platform, including its 11,000 stores and clubs in 27 countries, as well as its supply chain, merchandising, security and enterprise infrastructure.

However, in October 2014, Wal-Mart announced it is changing the way it prioritizes and funds IT projects by channeling all IT projects through Terrell's office. This centralization under the CIO is designed to eliminate IT project duplication, ensure company goals are met in order of importance, and utilize resources as efficiently as possible.

Being the one person ultimately responsible for every IT project launched by a company the size and scope of Wal-Mart is no easy task. Tackling that responsibility as a female executive can be even harder, but as Terrell told the audience at an April 2013 conference held by the Michigan Council of Women in Technology, she and other women are up to the challenge.

"I am a woman, and that will never change," said Terrell. "It's OK to look at women as primary caregivers with flexibility. And when you have a flexible environment, it's good for everyone."

To help other female technology professionals at Wal-Mart, Terrell has developed mechanisms to boost retention, such as creating mentoring circles that connect women with 20 fellow Wal-Mart employees.

Karen Etzkorn

Executive VP & CIO, HSN Inc. (HSNi)

When Karen Etzkorn assumed the role of CIO at HSNi in January 2013, she was not just breaking ground as the company's first female CIO. She was the first CIO of HSNi, period. In this position, the former senior VP and CIO



of Ascena Retail Group oversees all aspects of IT for HSNi's two operating segments — HSN and Cornerstone.

Etzkorn has played a pivotal role in the

ongoing strategic transformation of HSNi's core processes and technologies, with the long-term goal of creating a more customer-focused, seamless and efficient operation. She makes innovation the foundation of all her efforts.

"Innovation is the foundation of an exceptional customer experience," Etzkorn said during a session at the RetailROI Super Saturday event held in New York in January 2014. "Innovation is not a whiz-bang product. It's giving data to the consumer to let her know what she should buy."

HSNi redesigned its website in 2013, and Etzkorn is also actively involved in efforts to deliver highly personalized and targeted mobile offers, as well as gamified promotions through the HSN Arcade online game platform.

In addition, Etzkorn is overseeing the Boundaryless Retail initiative, which focuses on the "four screens" HSNi uses to engage consumers: TV, tablet, PC and smartphone. The ultimate goal of Boundaryless Retail is to create a seamless, community-oriented customer experience where personalized content, including imagery and video, cuts across all channels.

Leena Munjal

Senior VP customer experience and integrated retail, Sears Holdings Corp.



Leena Munjal, who has served with Sears Holdings Corp. as senior VP customer experience and integrated retail since September 2012 and started with

the company in 2004, sees technology as an enabler of an improved shopping experi-

ence. As part of that mission, in 2012 Munjal founded Integrated Retail Labs, a team at Sears charged with questioning the norm and pushing creative boundaries to redefine the shopping experience.

"Integrated retail is at the core of Sears Holdings' strategy," Munjal said. "That means leveraging our strengths, our team of more than 200,000 associates, 1,800 physical stores, online and mobile capabilities, the Shop Your Way membership program and a robust supply chain, and connecting them together through technology. That way, our members can get the best of both worlds: the ease of browsing online as well as the physical experience of shopping in-store."

Notable capabilities aimed at Shop Your Way loyalty members, developed by the Integrated Retail team under Munjal's leadership, include picking up, returning and exchanging purchases from a vehicle; in-store pickup of online purchases; expert associate advice delivered via online and mobile channels; and online reserving of in-store merchandise.

"Stay attuned to what customers are saying," advised Munjal. "You will be surprised how willing they are to offer feedback on what they like and what could be done better. Once you identify those opportunities, then think of how technology can be used as an enabler to improve their shopping experience. Obsess over your customers; don't get infatuated by technology."

Barbara Sanders

VP, IT chief architect, The Home Depot Inc.



Barbara Sanders, VP and IT chief architect of The Home Depot, is responsible for a wide scope of technology-related responsibilities. However, this fits right

in with the broad vision the 38-year IT veteran holds of her career and the retail and technology businesses in general.

"Retail is extremely fast-paced; you are never off the clock," said Sanders, who has spent the last 12 years working at Home Depot and was employed by Delta Airlines previously. >

"My teams are responsible for the overall technical architecture for Home Depot."

Overall technical architecture includes technology choices in hardware, software and application, and how they fit together. In addition, Sanders' team also runs Home Depot's business intelligence and advanced analytics platforms and applications.

"I'm quite excited about our Big Data efforts and the advanced mathematics we can bring to retail business problems at large scale," noted Sanders.

For other women who are just starting out in retail technology, Sanders offers an optimistic outlook.

"There are no barriers if you give every effort 100% of your capabilities," she said.

Sanders added that having good management is invaluable to success in the world of retail IT.

"I've worked for terrific leaders during the course of my career and have looked to them for mentorship," Sanders said.

Nadia Shouraboura

Founder and CEO, Hointer



Nadia Shouraboura, CEO and founder of specialty denimwear retailer Hointer, is disrupting the in-store customer experience by combining the most

customer-friendly elements of mobile, online and brick-and-mortar retailing. Working in an environment of retail technology disruption is nothing new for Shouraboura.

Prior to founding Hointer, which opened its first store in 2012, Shouraboura served as technology VP worldwide operations at Amazon.com. Joining Amazon in 2004, she oversaw the development and management of software, algorithms, infrastructure and operations that supported supply chain and fulfillment for the e-commerce pioneer.

With regard to women who want to make a mark in retail IT, Shouraboura's advice is "to love and enjoy retail completely."

"I was born in Soviet Russia, and I grew up not knowing what shopping was," she added.

"Today when I see customers having fun shopping, laughing, smiling, feeling confident and beautiful in their new outfits, I think about the difference retail makes in people's lives. We are so fortunate to be in retail."

While Shouraboura did not have a mentor per se, she credits Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos with teaching her how to be brave and innovative. She reminds everyone involved in retail IT that science is only half the equation.

"Retail is an amazing combination of science and art," said Shouraboura. "Retail science is responsible for making shopping flawless, frictionless and cost-effective. But shopping is also very much about the emotional connection with customers — making it an art. It's challenging, but when we get it right, it's magic."

Julie Bornstein

Executive VP, chief marketing officer & chief digital officer, Sephora



Since joining Sephora in August 2007, Julie Bornstein has been instrumental in ensuring the company maintains a strong, integrated digital presence. During her tenure as a senior VP at Sephora Digital, Bornstein oversaw the redesign of the Sephora.com e-commerce site and also doubled the company's online business. With a background that includes two years as a head of e-commerce at trendy specialty chain Urban Outfitters, it's no surprise Bornstein is focused on keeping up with the latest developments in digital retailing.

Since assuming her current role in March 2013, Bornstein has taken on such innovative projects as launching Color IQ, a partnership with Pantone that matches a photograph of a customer's skin to one of 121 specific skin tones and then recommends matching makeup. Taking the idea one step further, Bornstein also had Sephora partner with cosmetics brands to create new products to better match the range of Color IQ skin

tones, with the resulting addition of 2,900 new SKUs.

Bornstein is also active in developing Sephora's mobile and social offerings, as well as ensuring that the in-store experience is aligned and integrated with everything happening in the digital space. Her words at the Adobe Summit held in Salt Lake City in March 2014 sum up Bornstein's customer-centric approach to digital retailing.

"The real difference in managing a digital business is that we know what you like and we know what you don't," said Bornstein. "So we need to constantly think of problems and opportunities that we can address."

Sona Chawla

President of digital and chief marketing officer, Walgreen Co.



For Sona Chawla, president of digital and chief marketing officer of Walgreens, "delighting the customer" is more than a buzz phrase. "I'm responsible for

developing our brand and creating customer loyalty through the right customer experiences, initiatives and campaigns across all our channels, all founded on our customer insights and analytics," explained Chawla.

Chawla has held her current position since February 2014 and initially joined Walgreens in 2008 as senior VP e-commerce. Previously, she held the title of VP global online business at Dell Inc. Her specific responsibility today includes the industrywide struggle to bridge the virtual and physical worlds.

"Integrating digital and traditional marketing continues to be a strong focus for me," said Chawla. "Technology is enabling deeper and richer experiences between customers and brands. Through measurement and experimentation, we are honing our marketing to reach the right customers, at the right time, in the right place, with the right message."

For other women who are just starting out in or may want to enter retail technology, Chawla offers that openness to change and willingness to follow the needs of the >

customer are key.

“Don’t fall in love with technology for technology’s sake and don’t blindly copy what others are doing,” said Chawla. “See the possibilities in technology to drive customer experiences that uniquely align with your company’s core business and strategic positioning.”

Kelly Breitenbecher

Senior VP & CIO, Petco Animal Supplies Inc.



As CIO of Petco, Kelly Breitenbecher is responsible for technology, enterprise program management and large transformation projects related to process and systems in support of the company strategy. Breitenbecher has held her current title since August 2013, but has a wider professional background than some other IT executives.

In addition to having served as senior VP supply chain and operations for the defunct Circuit City chain before joining Petco in June 2009, Breitenbecher’s career inside Petco has crossed a number of departments and responsibilities.

This breadth of experience within Petco includes a stint as senior VP merchandise operations and omnichannel, where her responsibilities included overseeing merchandise planning and analysis, pricing and vendor operations, as well as creating an omnichannel business strategy. During this time, Breitenbecher was also involved in merchandising and marketing systems deployment and process re-engineering.

Breitenbecher has taken this holistic-based approach to her career inside Petco and applied it to how she manages the omnichannel engagement of consumers. As Breitenbecher told attendees of the Nielsen Consumer 360 Conference held in Phoenix in June 2013, she sees connecting with customers as a multi-faceted and continuous enterprise.

“Retailers need to create strong bonds

across channels, create connections with consumers across multiple channels and throughout the purchase cycle,” Breitenbecher said. “E-commerce is a revolution, not an evolution.”

Krista Berry

Executive VP & chief digital officer, Kohl’s Department Stores



Krista Berry, who has served as executive VP and chief digital officer of Kohl’s Department Stores since 2012, following a stint as general

manager of North America retail for Nike Inc., is developing and executing long-term digital strategies at Kohl’s during a very interesting time. Even as Kohl’s overall sales have been slumping, the Kohls.com business has more than doubled since 2011.

“We are always looking ahead and working on something new to enhance the customer’s experience and put the customer first,” said Berry.

Most recently, this has meant rolling out the option to buy items online and pick up in store at more than 100 stores in time for the busy holiday season. Kohl’s also recently launched ship-from-store capabilities at more than 800 locations, and began testing the Google Express service that lets members shop online from local stores with same-day or overnight delivery.

For those interested in following in her digital footsteps, Berry advises taking a wide focus on the business.

“Take every experience and opportunity that you are offered, because you never know how it will build your future career,” she said. “Be agile, nimble and flexible.”

Agility is also an invaluable trait within the digital space.

“Technologies and customer preferences change so quickly that we often have to build the plane as we fly,” concluded Berry. “One way to meet this challenge and remain nimble is to test a new initiative and then take what we’ve learned to improve upon

the process before it’s rolled out to all of our customers.”

Connie Kristovich

Senior director of merchandising, fulfillment and supply chain systems, Nordstrom Inc.



Connie Kristovich has accumulated quite a few accomplishments since starting her career with Nordstrom in 1987 as a merchant. Having held her current position since September 2010, Kristovich now has directors and enterprise architects reporting to her, as well as a staff of more than 300 full-time employees and 200-plus contractors.

How did Kristovich rise to such a position of prominence in her long and distinguished career at Nordstrom? A review of just some of her achievements gives a pretty good indication. Over the years, Kristovich has provided strategy and direction for a multi-year, \$50 million merchandise roadmap initiative to support merchandise assortment planning and allocation across the company, as well as development of the strategy and direction for a multi-year, \$75 million initiative to replace all key merchandising foundational systems.

Other career highlights include playing a crucial role in the strategy, implementation, change management, and overall technical and customer support of a \$250 million perpetual inventory system. Kristovich took on challenges, including developing a defect tracking process, managing a staff of analysts to work with the business users, maintaining budgets and building a knowledge repository for ongoing support.

Furthermore, Kristovich is responsible for providing strategy, direction and support for all merchandise, manufacturing, supply chain and fulfillment systems teams at Nordstrom, and creating development opportunities for the more than 800 subject matter experts in the Nordstrom IT division. It will be interesting to see what the future brings.