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EILEEN FISHER Outlines Processes to Drive Sustainable Design By 2020

At EILEEN FISHER, the design process goes beyond the material. For over 30 years, EILEEN FISHER has delivered modern apparel that not only offers simplicity, elegance, function and versatility, but also continues to push the boundaries of sustainability.

With more than 1,000 customer touch points worldwide and an employee base of 1,100 passionate individuals, EILEEN FISHER prides itself on being an organization that lives and breathes social consciousness. EILEEN FISHER's focus on 'doing business as a movement' has led the company to outline Vision2020, "an industry where human rights and sustainability are not the effect of a particular initiative, but the cause of a business well run. Where social and environmental injustices are not unfortunate outcomes, but reasons to do things differently."

Moving toward 2020

As EILEEN FISHER began working towards these goals, the company realized that to achieve its 2020 milestones, it needed to not only implement an end-to-end merchandise planning solution to deliver both flexibility and responsiveness and increase efficiency and quality, but also create new merchandising processes and workflows. EILEEN FISHER recognized that this process would not only impact planning, but the whole organization, from merchandising to design to sourcing and all the way through each sales channel, inevitably impacting the entire operation.

"We were mapping our path to 100% sustainability, and realized the way we were operating was not moving us toward our goals," said Regina Reyes, VP of Omni Planning,

EILEEN FISHER. “We are a very creative company and pride ourselves on a collaborative and organic way of working that’s felt right for the last 34 years. But because our current state of merchandise planning doesn’t have a solid connection to a financial goal, we are constantly in reactive mode.”

For example, before beginning the journey, EILEEN FISHER realized that its overall process of merchandise execution was becoming unsustainable. With various groups working independently and not connected to the bigger picture, EILEEN FISHER was going down the path of overdevelopment and overproduction, leading to excessive financial cost and negative environmental and social impact—consequently, placing the company in a situation where it was operating against its core values.

“Part of the issue is that everyone was looking at this in a siloed way, and no one was asking, ‘How do you trace back to the cause?’” said Patty Heilman, Organization Development Partner, EILEEN FISHER. “It started with looking at the beginning of the process and we realized that some things that worked before will no longer work if we want to meet our environmental and social, as well as financial goals.”

EILEEN FISHER realized it could not effectively deliver on its Vision2020 goals without assistance. It recognized the need to run merchandising decisions differently, in a more integrated and connected manner that would

lead to improvements throughout the entire organization, and implementing a merchandise planning function was core to that. However, if EILEEN FISHER was going to bring in outside help, a consulting firm would not only need to understand the task at hand, but also the organization’s unique culture and strategy.

“Our end-to-end process was made up of a large amount of cross functional work that needed to come together into one company timeline,” said Reyes. “As our core project team began its work to re-imagine the process, we went right to the granular and quickly realized we needed to first look at a high-level integrated process. It became evident that it would be difficult for us to do it on our own.”



Mapping the journey

EILEEN FISHER engaged with Columbus Consulting International to develop an integrated business process from design to distribution, which focused on introducing

a merchandise financial planning function and creating a company-wide universal calendar that supports the business cross-functionally.

“Columbus Consulting understood our challenge right away,” said Reyes. “We wanted to work with a consulting firm that acknowledged our objective of achieving operational excellence without losing our DNA; without losing what makes us EILEEN FISHER.”

To achieve this, Columbus Consulting created an 8-week project that began with the firm interviewing 45 key associates across all

of the organization's functions to gain an understanding of the current processes. Afterwards, the Columbus Consulting team created process workshop with 20 members of the EILEEN FISHER community to design the future processes and then work to create the high-level process and organizational requirements, as well as a detailed company-wide calendar dubbed the 'Virtual-Binder,' designed to serve as the roadmap for next steps and connect the entire organization along the way.

"From a change management perspective, it can be very helpful to have an outsider's point of view," said Heilman. "It's been a very collaborative process. We combined our collaborative approach with industry expertise to move us forward in an amazingly short amount of time."

Designing a sustainable future

Columbus Consulting's roadmap for EILEEN FISHER introduces an enhanced approach that is built on fluidity, trust and accountability

and allows the creative process to thrive. With a proper merchandise plan in place, EILEEN FISHER can ensure all components including the creative design process, merchandising, marketing initiatives and sell-in strategies support Vision2020.

Additionally, with the roadmap in place, EILEEN FISHER has the ability to infuse the creative process with customer-centric data and channel business plans, and to develop an assortment plan that will be informed by all cross-functional partners' input. The universal calendar will also ensure each step in the process is informing the next step, providing transparency throughout the organization along the journey.

"With Columbus Consulting's help, we are now comfortable integrating data and intuition," said Heilman. "That's really transformational for our company and we are excited about the future."



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