

The Future of Fashion: 5 Voices in Fashiontech

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September 15, 2021

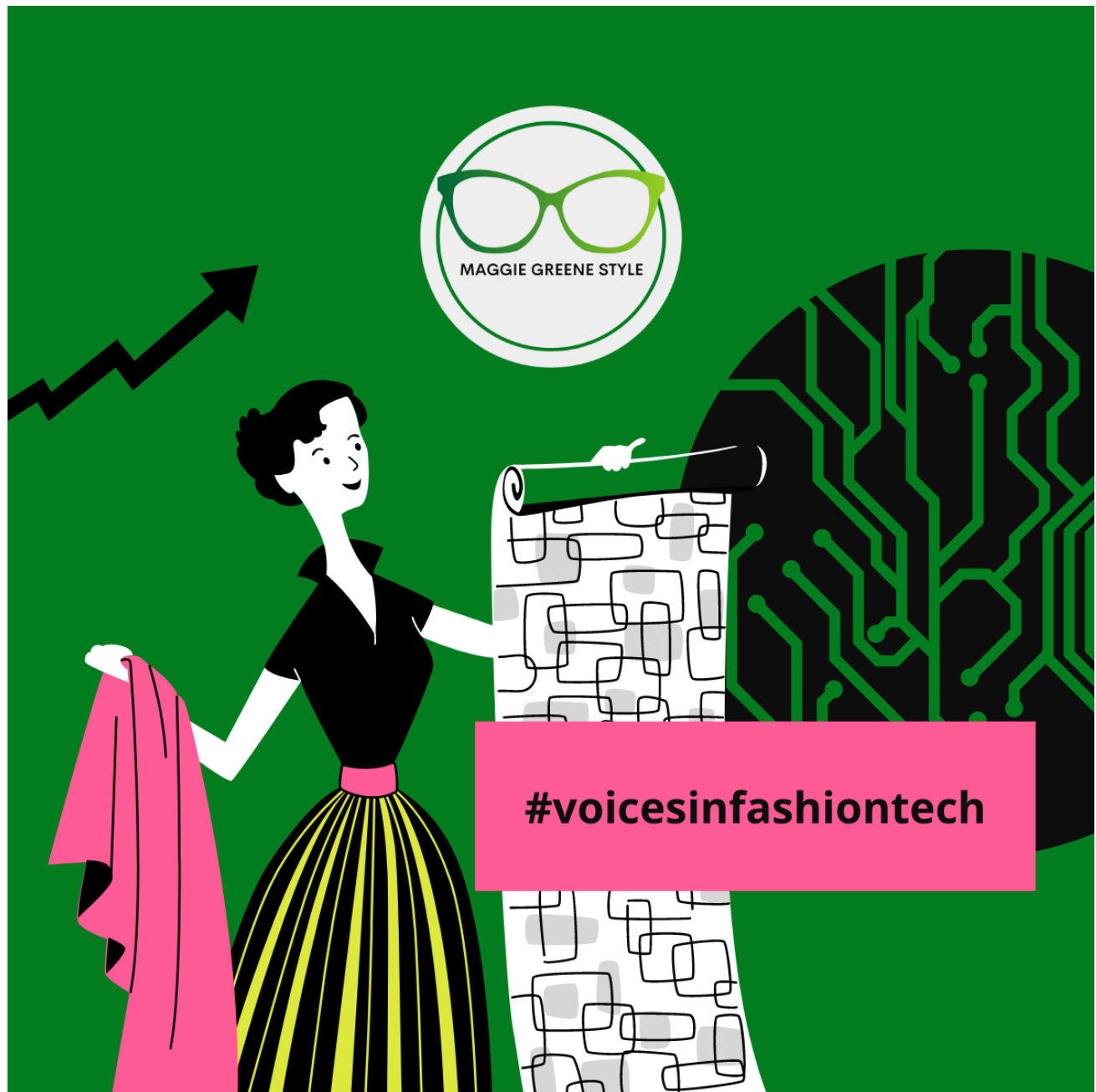
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Sustainable style is my bread and butter, the heart of my business, and a concept about which I'm super passionate. It's no surprise, then, that [#SecondhandSeptember](#) is a holiday, challenge, and practice I celebrate year-round.

If you're new to the [OxFam campaign](#), [here's a bit of history](#) for you. Worldwide, people are making a commitment to shop only secondhand for the month of September. Others, like myself, are taking it to the next level and making secondhand their first choice forever more.

This post is my own kind of celebration - a personal challenge that facilitated an opportunity to learn and grow. Those who contributed have a distinct common thread: strong voices with powerful messages worth sharing.

I've long been obsessed and enamored with technology. My relationship with it has largely been discrete, work-related, and entirely separate from my love of style and the future of fashion. What follows is the product of my recent deep-dive into the space where fashion and technology intersect: the wide world of wonders known as **fashiontech**.



What is fashiontech?

According to serial entrepreneur, Canadian, and CEO of Thinking Capital, Stephane Marceau, it's "the characterization of physical form and digital experience that converge towards your aspirational self." That level of *meta* is a bit more academic than my understanding.

It is virtually impossible to narrow the definition to a single essence beyond where technology and fashion meet for brands, in business. When you google the term you'll get results that run the gamut from luxury mushroom leather (like [this example](#)) to wearable pleasure jewelry ([check it out](#)), things like programmable [face masks](#) and [digital couture](#) - it truly goes WIDE and DEEP.

For this article, and my own sanity, I'm breaking it up into a few key sectors: digital marketplace, connected wearables, and design + manufacturing. A handful of experts, five to be exact, were generous enough to share their insights with me across a spectrum of markets. They are but a few in the world of fashiontech and I encourage you to explore further on your own. Pretty please [reach out to me](#) and share what cool things you learn as well!

1. Digital Marketplace

The retail landscape has changed dramatically over the past two decades, but the most interesting "trend" to me is the rise of secondhand and used clothing in this space. By this point it's oversaturated with market dominators like [Depop](#), Poshmark, and the RealReal in the lead.

I had a chance to interview a couple of people making waves in the online secondhand market and ask them what their vision for the future of fashion looks like.

Elefetheria Panagiotopoulou, [Borw](#)



Learn more about **Borw** by visiting their website [here](#).

Growing up Elefetheria, CEO of Borw, was surrounded by crafty and conscious consumers. Her family was thoughtful about everything they purchased, especially clothing. “We didn’t want to throw anything away and instead wanted to repair or upcycle,” she said. Today she considers herself a “fashion minimalist” and draws her inspiration from nature. “Whatever I see around me that appears to be well-balanced” inspires her, too.

She is actively working alongside her team to provide a solution that addresses circularity. The app she founded, Borw, is touted as the ONLY one where you can “support sustainable and circular fashion in 6 different ways: rent, hire, buy, sell, donate, and recycle. It’s a veritable one-stop-shop for the conscious consumer who’s ready to break up with fast fashion.

Her Vision for the Future of Fashion

“In order to solve a problem once and for all, you must first identify its source,” Elefetheria said. “Our mobile app provides users with numerous options... and we only focus on sustainable fashion brands... we're changing the entire global supply chain cycle.” She sees technology playing a huge role in the success of this disruption as well. “Technology has the potential to change everything, but we must take precautions in where we focus our attention and what we seek to resolve. The future of fashion is green, sustainable, ethical, and circular. If all of these terms are represented by technological advancements in the fashion industry, this will be the most significant fashion revolution in history.”

Call to Action for Consumers

“Respect yourself, others, and the environment.” She says this is also the foundation for her brand, Borw. It’s a play on the word *mporw* which is Greek for “I can do it.”

Jennifer Mielke, StyleCrush



You can learn more about **StyleCrush** by visiting their website [here](#).

In 2009, concerns about the environmental and social impacts of the fashion industry led Jennifer to opt out of buying from mainstream retail altogether. She turned to secondhand to supply her considerable love of style and was amazed by the practically unworn clothes she found in thrift stores. Since then she's been experimenting with ways to make it easy for anyone who wants a more ethical and sustainable wardrobe to find clothes they LOVE secondhand.

Her latest project, [StyleCrush](#), is a member-owned resale marketplace that uses outfit inspiration + wishlist fulfillment to help people find affordable, sustainable (secondhand) clothing for easy, confidence elevating style. Check out [the StyleCrush campaign on](#)

IFundWomen to learn more about the platform, get involved, and show your support for secondhand first.

Her Vision for the Future of Fashion

In Jennifer's ideal world there would be exponentially fewer drops from brands each year. 12 max, to be precise, versus the 30+ collections released by so many brands. "There are a lot of interesting, exciting things going on in the fashion space with technology," so it's possible, she says. She also envisions a world where we consume LESS fashion overall.

Call to Action for Consumers

"[Know that] we cannot keep consuming at this level. Retail is not therapy. Buying things is not going to make you feel better. That little mini hit [of dopamine] that you get [from shopping] is not doing anything to address the underlying issues. Nobody needs to buy anything new almost ever. My number one life tip is look Secondhand First."

2. Connected Wearables

From computer-generated dresses to fitness trackers, connected wearables are on the rise. The implications for investors, designers, and consumers are far-reaching and tough to wrap your head around. There are so many possibilities. If you research this concept, you'll find a lot of criticism about safety and privacy, but there are also amazing, out-of-this-world benefits.

Evo Heyning, Playable Agency



You can learn more about **Playable Agency** by visiting their website [here](#).

Evo has served as a consultant across innovation verticals for the past decade since forming Toyshoppe Systems, a small and powerful team building wearable technology fashions for film, television, and theme parks. She's also worked as a strategic consultant "leading innovation sprints and teams inside fashion and technology companies alike, primarily focused on metaverse and XR-related interactive technologies and interfaces that are enabled in this rapid time of iteration and development."

Today, with [Playable Agency](#), she's focused on the "wearable fashion experiences tied to metaverse media" (think smart glasses), exploring "new capabilities as a connected OS for our fashion and style experience," she said. "I leverage technology in every aspect of my work," Evo said, "from building new prototypes to creating new worlds. I also focus on the connection points between these experiences and my work in the open metaverse interoperability community."

Her Vision for the Future of Fashion

She sees a future that continues "creating connection in the midst of deeply disconnected times" and says she's eager to see "more fashion technologies empower empathy and deeper human connection over time." She also envisions a world in which high-tech high fashion expands into the mainstream. "I most want to create fully interactive video dresses that offer the viewer an experience of moving between worlds in a dress... for interface and wearability of technology for future red carpets."

Call to Action for Consumers

Be aware that "privacy, security of the data, and your ability to be hacked by someone other than the fashion or technology provider is a key concern... Very few companies have a strong ethics policy or values statement that protects wearers...and not all technology providers are working to benefit all of life on this planet."

3. Design + Manufacturing

You may be familiar with the 2013 [Rana Plaza collapse](#) that inspired a global movement called [Fashion Revolution Week](#), celebrated every year on the anniversary of the collapse (April 24th). More than a thousand workers were killed or injured, and that's just one example of poor working conditions in the international garment industry. Ethical and sustainable manufacturing is a hot topic in fashion, one on which you can find hundreds of thousands of resources online. One piece of this complex puzzle is garnering even more attention with respect to circular economy - design. Both design and manufacturing are intimately connected.

Today the challenge goes beyond reuse and recycling, or shopping only secondhand. For the fashion and textile industry, designing and manufacturing for end-of-life is especially critical for moving forward. The average consumer doesn't give much thought to what happens to their clothes once they're done with them - whether they are donated or deposited directly into landfills. Relevant pro tip: never throw your clothes away in the trash.

Sustainability also requires considerations for inclusion. How can we cause less damage to the planet AND empower humanity as a whole to do their part as functional stewards? Technology, of course, plays a prominent role in all of it.

Dr. Joanne Brasch, California Product Stewardship Council (CALPSC)



You can learn more about **CALPSC** by visiting their website [here](#).

As someone whose PhD is in textile economics, Dr. Brasch likes to tell people cotton was her “gateway fiber.” In general, her studies surrounded the “global trade of commodities and the policies regulating the flow of goods around the globalized supply system,” she said. She

spent some time researching the role of textiles in the healthcare sector as well, analyzing what could be reused or recycled, and ways for adopting innovative materials and designs that minimize waste overall. Today she works in the “wonderful world of waste,” specifically providing education and advocacy for producer responsibility in waste policies at [CALPSC](#).

She shared some staggering facts about waste management as it relates to wearables and the fashion and textile industry at large. For example, did you know waste management is the fifth most deadly career in the country? That’s due in no small part to battery fires - yes, you read that right, battery fires. The catalysts for many of these fires are tiny embedded batteries that you might find in things like your smartwatch, light-up party beads, or interactive greeting cards. Embedded batteries in the waste and recycling streams require special disposal (such as e-waste recycling or a producer take-back program). Most people are aware of regulated toxins from material coatings on clothes and home goods since they must be disclosed to consumers, but embedded batteries are often overlooked. Not only are they apt to cause fires, if batteries end-up in the landfill, they can leach contaminants to our wastewater systems.

Her work in education and advocacy also means staying on top of legislation. The laws and regulations in the fashion industry are outdated and it’s hard to keep up with the speed at which technology is advancing. “When you look at fashion... we really don't want to mandate or set product standards. I'd rather see a performance standard where brands can take different methods of demonstrating commitment to textile recovery and reuse, versus telling someone how to make their product,” she said. The laws are also super complex and, as with any legal language, there are opportunists who lean on the loopholes. As one example, since manufacturers get discounts on tariffs for waterproofing, they are waterproofing items that don’t even need it. The worst part? “We know they're toxic to our waters,” she said.

Her Vision for the Future of Fashion

Dr. Brasch wants to see makers and artisans doing their thing and getting recognition for it. “...the people out there doing the mending and doing the upcycling are the front lines of reuse, repair, and repurposing and already exist in our communities...I just want to see them grow. I want to see them get a bigger platform.” She also envisions, in an ideal future state, “easier access for the average person to participate in repair and reuse systems.”

Call to Action for Consumers

Particularly if you’re interested in learning more about the intersection of fashion and technology, she suggests looking at what is happening with plastics right now for what the future holds regarding legislation. She also says, to manufacturers and designers, to pursue

more green design, "not only in the product construction, but down at the polymer level." Consumers can only benefit from educating themselves about these issues as well and support the brands willing to splinter from the status quo to support legislation. To learn more and get involved at the community level, she suggests seeking out statewide stewardship councils like CALPSC in your state and local area. Get involved at the individual and business levels.

Katherine “Katy” Schildmeyer, KS Apparel Design & Fashion Business Consulting



You can learn more about **KS Apparel Design** by visiting their website [here](#).

Before Katy's love affair with fashion began, they were a staunch advocate for the Birthday Suit. Like most children in their earliest years, if they didn't like how a fabric looked or felt, they'd rip it off and run around naked. They later developed a distinct personal style that drew on inspirations like Joan Jett and the raw, punk rock vibes of the 1970s before it was appropriated into the mainstream. With 30+ years in the industry, Katy, owner and CEO of KS Apparel Design, has seen firsthand the impact technology has had on fashion.

Can you imagine a world in which retail workers tallied inventory by hand? It wasn't that long ago, yet it's challenging to picture given how dependent we are on technology today. As a fashion designer, Katy also has seen the obvious limitations of technology. They describe software and technology as that which looks for what is known, what's already there. Conversely, it's their job, they said, to account for what's not there, what is unknown. This is especially relevant in the context of drafting patterns and producing garments at-scale.

The tech sector in general is rife with peacocking patriarchal intellectuals who think they know all there is to know about everything. They can be arrogant and shortsighted, often completely overlooking the context on the ground - the actual work which the tech is designed to support, enable, or optimize. As a consultant, part of Katy's job is to tear proverbial holes in their approach, show them where things can go wrong or where the software will invariably fail. While they appreciate the benefits of social media and technology-enabled communication, marketing, and business operations, Katy also sees technology as somewhat detrimental to how companies find people to hire.

Artificial Intelligence and bots designed to make recruiting easier notoriously overlook qualified candidates. The technology isn't designed to spot creativity nor unique qualifications. When they first started working in the industry, it was more of a "Boys Club," Katy said, where hiring managers made decisions based on nepotism or other personal considerations that were ultimately irrelevant to the work. It was in those early years Katy experienced sexism and ageism for the first time in their career. They expressed feeling "othered" and treated as less than in the industry because they didn't fit conventional standards of beauty or gender. One of several examples was them applying for a job as a menswear buyer at a major clothing retailer and ultimately being rejected because they were not a man. It's unsettling to think that would happen today, but alas, there is much diversity, equity, and inclusion work to be done.

Their Vision for the Future of Fashion

In Katy's vision for the future of fashion, the overall talent acquisition process must change to be successful. "I believe that companies are only as good as the talent they bring on. And if you have mediocre hiring teams, you have mediocre teams. If you have people that are fearful of hiring somebody that is overqualified, or they are very skilled and talented, it tells me that you're fearful of success. Let's hire some skilled talent."

Call to Action for Consumers

"Support your neighbor. Put your money back into your community, it makes better parks, better streets better, everything. So put back into your community and buy local or buy made in the USA. Let's celebrate each other. Let's put money in the pockets of the neighbors that we have. Because it makes everything better, everything's more connected. And don't be afraid to voice your opinion to companies about what it is that you want, what you want to see. The more feedback they get, the better off consumers are."

Final Thoughts + Takeaways

- There are myriad niches and special interests associated with the fashiontech space.
- Fashiontech touches us all in some form or another, as clothing/textiles and technology are integral elements in our everyday lives.
- Consumers' relationships with the fashion industry have changed over time, and they are actively evolving. There is less blind spending and more intentional investing going on than in past decades, although overconsumption is still a concern.
- The best way to learn about what's important to you is to conduct research. Seek out reputable sources, join community groups, and connect with policymakers. Arm yourself with information so that you can make informed decisions for yourself and your family.
- Technology has limitations and can never truly replace the human touch or experience.
- Consider what matters to you when purchasing clothing - from design to manufacturing to distribution and everything in between, there's a lot more to it than meets the eye.

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Maggie Greene

As a passionate ally, communicator, and fashionista, Maggie puts the personal in personal brand and style. She helps transform the way career professionals see themselves at work in all manner of styling - from wardrobe to resume and everything in between. Her secondhand first approach helps counter consumption culture and reduce global fashion waste.

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