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Kelly Slater's Outerknown Brand Opening First Store

"We are opening our first retail shop...right before the holiday rush," Travis Heard, the brand's head of finance, operations and strategy, said at WWD's Digital Forum.

By [Booth Moore](#) on November 26, 2019



Travis Heard
John Salangsang

Outerknown, the [Los Angeles](#)-based sustainable clothing brand started in 2015 by pro surfer [Kelly Slater](#) and backed by [Kering](#), is stepping into retail, opening its first store at The Point in El Segundo, Calif., by the end of November.

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For 2020, Outerknown is also looking to expand its women’s wear and denim offerings. “Denim we launched a year ago. Initially, it was [online](#) only, but next year there will be more of a focus getting jeans into the marketplace in a bigger way. It’s a massive opportunity for us, but the touch and feel and omnichannel approach will be very important,” he said.

Another growth market is international, said Heard, who was in conversation with Rob Keve, chief executive officer and cofounder of Flow, a business-to-business [software](#) platform that has helped brands including Outerknown go global, providing e-com, payment and shipping resources. Heard shared his brand’s journey to selling internationally, which included a failed start with a different platform resulting in customer dissatisfaction with pricing, duties and shipping fees, while Keve offered tips to U.S. brands on how and when to go global.

“Look at the international traffic hitting your site compared to your international sales. Most U.S. sites have 35 or 40 percent of traffic from overseas but less than 5 percent of DTC sales from overseas. When you see that it’s the right time to capitalize on it,” said Keve, making a pitch for Flow’s ability to help brands manage pricing on a country to country basis, test customer preferences for payment and duties, as well as combat fraud.

“Also, the customer segment is the same internationally; if you are focused on Millennials interested in sustainable brands, for instance, they are the same in Australia, in Singapore and in L.A., and often cheaper to acquire, so think about it from a global perspective,” Keve added.

Although the international market accounts for just 15 percent of Outerknown’s sales, “There is definitely a strong appetite,” said Heard, adding that Japan and Switzerland have been hot spots. “We have seen business double since working with Flow. That’s what you want to see, and when you layer on other elements, that the experience is better for our customers, and we’ve seen a 60 percent reduction in shipping costs, it has made



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us more profitable. That our global messaging is now able to be conveyed around the world, not just domestically, that is a value add.”

Outerknown is a coastal-casual brand of clothing made using organic, recycled and regenerated materials. When asked about the rising competition in the sustainable fashion sector, Heard demurred. “For us, we’ve always embraced the open source model because we want to change the industry.” (Slater has been transparent about his supply chain, releasing the names of the companies that manufacture Outerknown’s \$95 recycled nylon swim trunks, \$128 pocket T-shirts, \$165 organic cotton twill chinos and other items around the world.)

“Rising tides lift all boats. And it becomes more fun, because sustainability as the point of differentiation is no longer as strong, kind of like organic food, when Walmart started labeling everything organic, it didn’t have the same punch. For us as storytellers, it’s always been important to differentiate based on product first. Customers need to like the product, then like that it’s sustainable.”

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