

A PERFECT FIT

DEBORAH LEE SPENT 19 YEARS WORKING IN VARIOUS ROLES WITH BT. SHE LEFT IN DECEMBER 2016 TO TAKE ON THE POSITION OF CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER AT YOOX NET-A-PORTER GROUP (YNAP). THE COMPANY WAS FORMED IN 2015 FOLLOWING THE MERGER OF LUXURY FASHION RETAILERS YOOX AND NET-A-PORTER



Q WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO YNAP?

I've been a customer of many of their brands since 2009 and always loved the service and the products. I loved the idea of bringing together two very successful but complementary businesses. In fact, when the Group HR Director of **BT** told the rest of the team I was leaving, she said: "A factory of fairies has put together the perfect role for Deborah."

Q HOW DID YOUR INTEREST IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY START?

Most of my family are in the sector. My mother has her own business making made-to-measure clothes, and I worked with her from a young age. I made my first embroidered apron at five years old, which she found the other day. One of my sisters is a make-up artist and the other is on the design team for **Topshop**.

In terms of favourite designers, I really like what **Victoria Beckham** has done. She's brought together some really clean lines and evolved her style to more casual things. I'm a bit of a magpie though; I like what I like. That's another reason why this is such a perfect organisation for me. I'm not tied to one brand!

Q DESCRIBE THE CULTURE AT YNAP

It's a relatively young company that has grown really quickly, with a backbone of entrepreneurial possibility. Everywhere you go, you can feel that optimism, that anything is possible. It's got an energy and vibrancy to it.

And they know how to celebrate. Last year, the foyer was transformed into a Christmas grotto with mulled wine. They have summer ice cream parties and do things for Halloween. There's always something going on.

Q ARE THERE CULTURAL CHALLENGES FROM THE MERGER OF TWO ORGANISATIONS?

There are differences between an Anglo-Saxon and an Italian organisation. To become truly global, you really need to understand where the company cultures and where the national cultures differ and help people through that. There's a lot of goodness to squeeze out and an opportunity for change. My

role is to take the best of both organisations and build something that's better from them.

A common-thread example is empowering women. Sixty-one per cent of **YNAP** and 50 per cent of our C-suite are women. That's pretty special and is a testament to our CEO; he is seriously passionate about this agenda and several others!

Ultimately, the business that emerges in the next few years will have a distinct culture; you'll be able to see where the roots of it are, but it will have evolved into something our people can get behind. That also needs to be ingrained in the people.

Q WHAT CHALLENGES DOES YNAP CURRENTLY FACE?

Constantly innovating to meet and anticipate the changing needs of our customers. One major investment we're making is our new platform to underpin our omni-channel strategy. We're working with **IBM** to build something new in the industry.

Our platform matters because we're an e-commerce business. Tailoring technology for our business and our customers to access anywhere is essential. Large-scale technical projects can be difficult and high-pressured. The pride in getting them done is amazing. I have experience with such projects from **BT**, but for some of the team, it's new territory. The challenge means opportunity. Delivering this is a super learning experience, and learning is fun.

Q YOU'RE AN ACTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA USER. HOW HAVE DIFFERENT PLATFORMS BENEFITED YOU IN YOUR CAREER?

Different platforms have served different purposes. **LinkedIn** is a great way to access people, networks and information. You can collate and control it and share knowledge. From a personal point of view, I mostly use it for staying in touch with networks. It's amazing how quickly it can open doors to people in particular industries at a senior level. I also use **Instagram** a lot, which is the tool from a fashion industry perspective. It lets you see what the trends are and where people are and what they are saying. ■