

christina zabat-fran

2017 TOP 10 30-SOMETHING

In an era of ubiquitous branding, establishing one that sets a company apart is more important than ever. At St. John Knits, Vice President and General Counsel Christina Zabat-Fran is at the helm of a team that has brought the iconic Southern California fashion house into an omnichannel e-commerce world — while maintaining the devotion of the 55-year-old company's loyal customer base.

St. John's most visible public window — its website — doubles as a private database, in which orders are organized and fulfilled in concert with the company's other boutiques. Zabat-Fran worked closely with the company's CIO to build the partnerships with technology and data experts that gave St. John a custom information system that anticipates future inventory needs and customer wants. That gives invaluable insight into the brand's current and future performance. "What are people buying and when are they buying it, and how can we use that data to make smarter, more informed decisions when we're designing our products?" Zabat-Fran says. "Our website is now a key tool in helping figure that out."

Other technological hurdles included building an online system that reflected the lifestyles of its globe-trotting customers, who include CEOs, entrepreneurs, and judges, as well as Hollywood A-listers and tastemakers in the industry. The website is now St. John's second biggest customer-driver, behind only its flagship boutique on Fifth Avenue (Zabat-Fran is quick to point out that the online portal does not require leasing a building in Manhattan). Now it's being enhanced through a brand-wide emphasis on interactivity. With Zabat-Fran's leadership, St. John has embraced social media and integrated it into its website. St. John's customers tend to be successful professional women, and the brand seeks to celebrate their stories and provide a platform for them to do the same. "We are working smart for our customer, so she can buy where she wants, when she wants, how she wants," Zabat-Fran says.

St. John's growth hasn't just been online. The brand has blossomed internationally, too, with Zabat-Fran partnering with the business through the opening of flagship stores in China, Russia, and Azerbaijan. St. John now operates in 25 countries. Her team works with St. John's director of international business to vet potential license partners, and Zabat-Fran oversees the development and compliance with the company's code of conduct and ethics and FCPA obligations. She believes her legal department is a steward for innovation. "I've learned so much from our CEO and executive team about how to build and grow a brand," she reflects.

As part of the inaugural class of the University of California Irvine School of Law, and the only graduate to go directly in-house, Zabat-Fran advocates strongly for the in-house profession by speaking about her career path and mentoring law students. Giving back is something she considers part of her personal brand, which she knows how to build. **30**



Christina Zabat-Fran
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AGE: 34