

THE FAMOUS LIFE

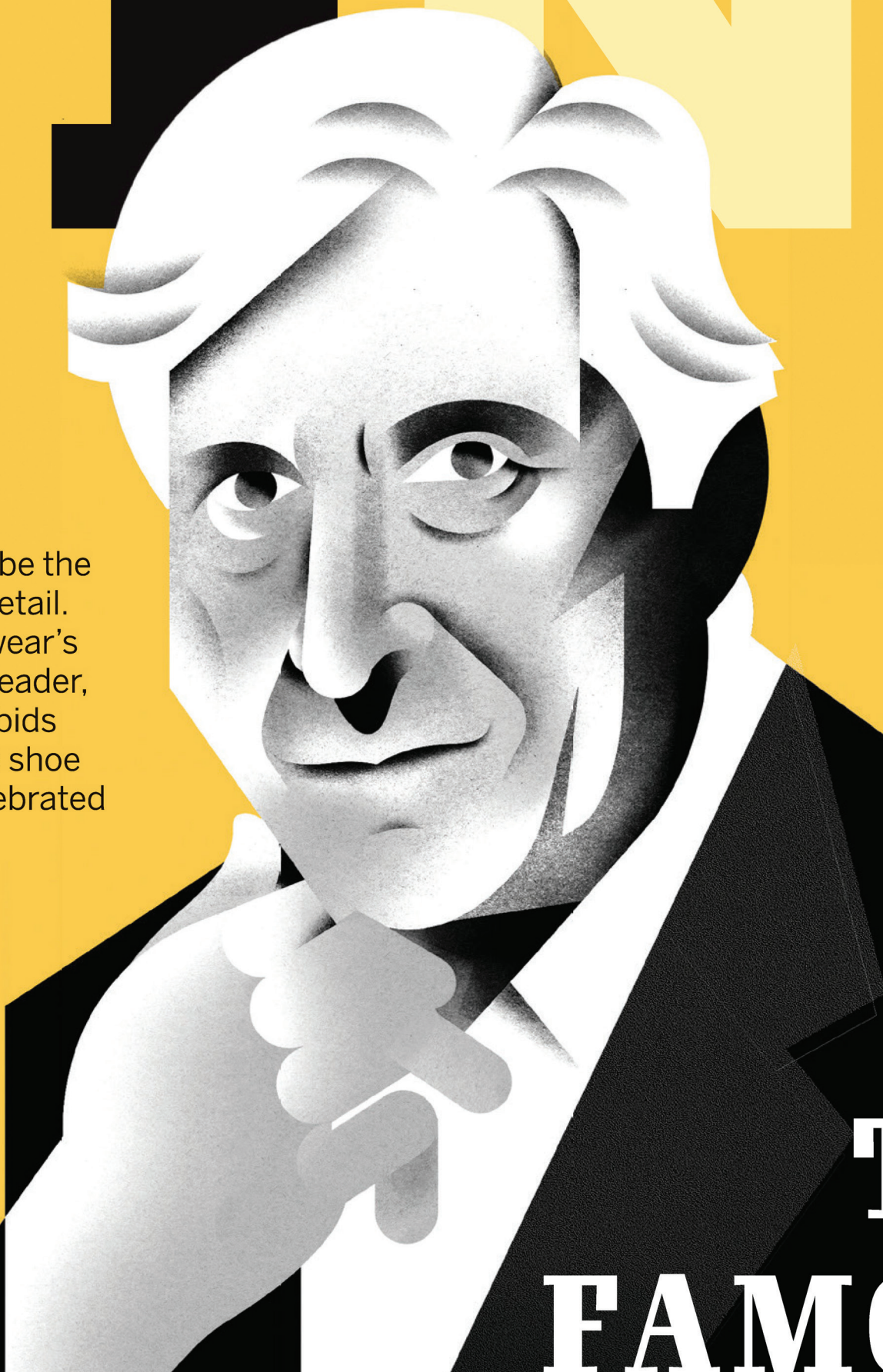
PRIVATE MATTERS

Why have so many beloved brands and retailers gone bankrupt? Hint: It's a rich answer

TIMELESS MODEL

Actress and activist Brooke Shields muses about a new collection and why her daughters won't bare their midriffs

He might just be the nicest guy in retail. Famous Footwear's ever-popular leader, **Rick Ausick**, bids farewell to the shoe biz after a celebrated 40-year run.



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Frank Weil

Connected Experiences

Frank Weil, chief customer officer at KWI, reveals how footwear brands and retailers can create seamless shopping experiences.

According to Frank Weil, chief customer officer at commerce solution-focused firm KWI, it's essential for retailers to connect online and offline channels.

"While technology allows retailers to be faster and smarter, at the core, customers still want to be treated with a personalized touch and feel known as an individual shopper. That means when a customer walks into a store, a salesperson should be able to access size information and previous purchases — both online and in-store — with a small amount of input," he said. "Only when all your retail technology works together can there be this holistic and unified experience for the customer. Brands that continue to silo their customer in an online or in-store bucket will lose out."

Here, Weil reveals how brands and retailers can better connect both digital and physical shopping experiences.

How do you make shopping online more seamless?

FW: "Keep it simple and easy, and do not overcomplicate the experience. But offer as much information as possible on fit — that's one of the primary reasons a

consumer will return your product. How can you deliver the same level of customer service online that you do in-store? M.Gemi is a great example: They offer virtual custom-fit consults and detailed sizing information that includes fit notes based on the design (i.e., if it starts out snug but is designed to stretch) and feedback from their staff testers, who try out every shoe."

How do you improve the in-store experience?

FW: "A successful in-store experience is all about making life easier for the customer. This could mean short lines, easy returns and being able to track or order something in another style or size if not available. All of this can be accomplished by using the data available for each customer. Many retailers don't have an accessible 360-degree view of their customer, so they can't respond to their needs quickly or even predict their needs even before they come in. But when all systems speak with each other — online and off — a more complete picture of the customer emerges, and in-store salespeople can add value to the shopping experience."



LIM College's townhouse in New York

Outside the Box

Michael Londrigan describes the latest trends in consumer behavior.

"From the academic perspective — which is no different from the business perspective — the trends that we see continuing are twofold: consumers wanting the product when and where they order it, and consumers [valuing] experiences over physical products," said Michael Londrigan, VP for academic affairs at LIM College.

And while the desire for instant gratification is "nothing new," he said consumers' desire for experiences versus the purchase of a physical product is presenting challenges for the footwear industry.

His advice? "Create products that offer additional benefits through the use of technology (such as step counters built into the shoe),

cater to fit and comfort, and — first and foremost — provide some form of customization. If you can't create a unique experience around the footwear, then offer the consumer something they can't get from the big-box retailers."



Karen Bellantoni

ALL TOGETHER NOW

Karen Bellantoni, vice chairman at real estate firm RKF, shares her top tip for brands and merchants seeking new retail space.

"The best advice for a footwear retailer: If you want to succeed and have a strong brick-and-mortar presence, you must be surrounded by likable and relevant brands. Recently, we placed Sam Edelman, Frye, Nike and Golden Goose in the same retail corridor on Spring Street in Manhattan. Footwear brands need to be near other footwear brands, and the same goes for health and wellness, and athleisure. Retail clustering is a timeless strategy for success."