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NEWS

Panel Fields Queries From Oz

A group of Los Angeles apparel industry exporters fielded questions from Australian manufacturers during a recent video conference organized by the **California Fashion Association (CFA)** and the **Queensland Trade and Investment Office** in Los Angeles.

The panel included Barbara Kramer, co-founder of **Designers & Agents**; Bruce Berton, director of international business consulting at **Stonefield Josephson Inc.**; Robert Krieger, president of **Norman Krieger Inc.**; Crystal Zarpas, attorney and partner at **Mann & Zarpas**; Diane Hileman, partner in the retail consultancy **Sperling Hileman Group**; Karen Mamont, fashion and public relations director of **Twin Concepts**; Howard Ruben, owner of **Howard Ruben Public Relations**; and Ilse Metchek, executive director of the CFA.

All the panelists agreed; buyers are looking for great new product, but it has to be right for the American market.

"Probably the first thing you need to do is figure out if something is viable in this country," said Kramer.

Mamont encouraged the group to visit Los Angeles and shop the local boutiques.

"You have to go to the stores and see the lines that your line would hang next to," she said.

There's plenty of research to do before an international apparel company begins to sell its brand in the United States, Zarpas said.

She warned that the goods must be made in compliance with U.S. laws and

must not infringe on another company's trademark.

"Federal laws, state laws. We've got different laws depending on how you come into this country. You don't want to get shut down before you even take off," she said. "It's important to get an attorney and get one that's familiar with the garment industry."

Hileman, Metchek and Berton discussed the channels of retail distribution, as well as some of the challenges and requirements of selling to department stores.

Ruben discussed the final phase of the process. "Once you have the apparatus in place and are ready to come to the U.S., a marketing and advertising strategy is critical because competition is fierce. The first step is getting your name out to the trade publications. Once the product starts getting into the retail pipeline, then the story becomes more of a consumer one."

The Australian manufacturers inquired about a range of subjects, from trying to gauge the interest in Australian apparel to trying to determine the cost of securing trademark rights. The manufacturers asked about selecting the proper trade show, navigating retailer chargebacks and retailers' interest in new brands.

One manufacturer asked where to find a distributor for his collection.

Kramer advised the group to try to sell to a few retailers before seeking out a distributor.

"You need to establish a track record before a distributor becomes interested in distributing your brand," she said.—*Alison A. Nieder*