

# Footwear News Online

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Featuring: James Curleigh New President & CEO

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## Retailers Bullish on New Keen President

JENNIFER ERNST

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NEW YORK — Keen shook things up in the executive suite again last week — and retailers like the results.

The Portland, Ore.-based company named ex-Salomon head James Curleigh to the position of president and CEO following an announcement last month that former president Kirk Richardson would assume the newly created post of chief of corporate social responsibility.

"We are really excited," said Denise Friend, the women's footwear buyer at Sumner, Wash.-based REL. "We worked with James at Salomon and we think he's a great match. [Keen] doesn't need a lot of change; he's picking up a company in really good shape. James is just going to take them to the next level."

Chris Burson, outdoor performance buyer for Las Vegas-based Zappos.com, agreed: "James is a fairly young guy and very energetic. He is going to inject a lot of energy into Keen." Burson added that much of the brand's excitement has been driven by some of its more youthful outdoor styles, and that Curleigh would be an asset in developing that market. "James is going to bring great marketing ideas and focus on how they need to grow their business," he said.

Ryan Strong, the merchandise division manager at Salt Lake City-based Backcountry.com, said he is unfazed by another change in leadership at Keen (Curleigh is the third brand head in its five-year history). "Keen is such a fast-growing company that it doesn't surprise me they have gone through so many changes," he said. "They continue to react to the changes in the market, so [the structure shift] doesn't concern me — I am still going to continue to buy Keen." And the shakeup might also have benefits for the green end of the product, Strong said: "Kirk moving into sustainability really excites me."

Speaking to Footwear News last week, on his second day on the job, Curleigh said he would be bringing international expertise to the brand. As a "triple citizen" of Canada, the U.S. and England who has spent significant time in all three countries, the executive said his understanding of those markets would be an advantage. "When you put that [experience] into the business market with the Canadian market and the European market, it sets up for a relatively easy point of entry for me," he said, adding that the firm wanted to approach global expansion in a strategic manner. "Doing it the right way the first time is very, very important to us."

Curleigh also said the lessons he learned in his 12 years at Salomon, where he led the company's push into the outdoor market, would be particularly applicable to growing the Keen business. "I see a lot of parallels with what Keen has been able to do," he said. "Keen is a brand that is 5 years old, and look what it's achieved already. It has done a phenomenal job of trying to redefine outdoors."

And shrugging off concerns about instability in the firm's management ranks, Curleigh said he was in it for the long haul. "[Keen] is a place I see myself for a very long time. I call Portland home, and that's where [I'm] going to be." — **With contributions from Meghan Cass**

