DESIGN BY COMMITTEE
WE INVENTED THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE!

By Craig Crawford, Conference Chairman

Let's face it; as Designers and Product Developers, social collaboration is at the heart of what we do; we take our inspiration from the world around us and share it amongst our teams to refine and drive product concepts and moods. And then, when we're ready, we release these to our development partners to gather their input before we start to create products and raw materials.

Aren't line-in-progress meetings collaborative? As we look at what is selling, and what we as brands represent, we exchange ideas in an open forum to debate out our next steps. How about fit sessions? Nothing could be more collaborative than a team of experts discussing drape, fit, trim and detail on prototype garments and then agreeing on next steps to get these garments where they need to be.

If line finalization meetings aren't collaborative, then I don't know what is! As teams, we create fabric, color, and trim marriages to finalize product into an assortment within a line plan.

And this doesn't stop at market, does it? Our retail partners are also our collaborators. They want more of this or less of that, and as brand partners we react accordingly and take collaborative action to achieve the best results: sell through at full price!

Even our visual merchandising guidelines for retail and our eCom merchandising activities are collaborative; how things are displayed on the shop floor or online are carefully constructed and guided by brand guidelines and experts of display and storytelling. And the execution of the brand vision that happens at the store level - sometimes half way around the world from where the vision began - couldn't happen without a retail team working together with head office.

In store collaboration doesn't begin and end with merchandising activities, does it? Feedback to brand headquarters, product training, customer service, even selling to our consumers is all collaborative.

We want our customers to like what we've created. We want them to understand the provenance of our products. We want them to be as loyal to us as we are to them. Trust and connect - cornerstones of collaboration.

Our jobs really are about sharing, collaborating, trusting, and connecting and yet, with all of this, why are most of the tools we use at work not collaborative but instead designed to organize and monitor? Sure we need to keep track of things, but why has maintaining your email inbox become your job? Why is maintaining a spreadsheet your job?
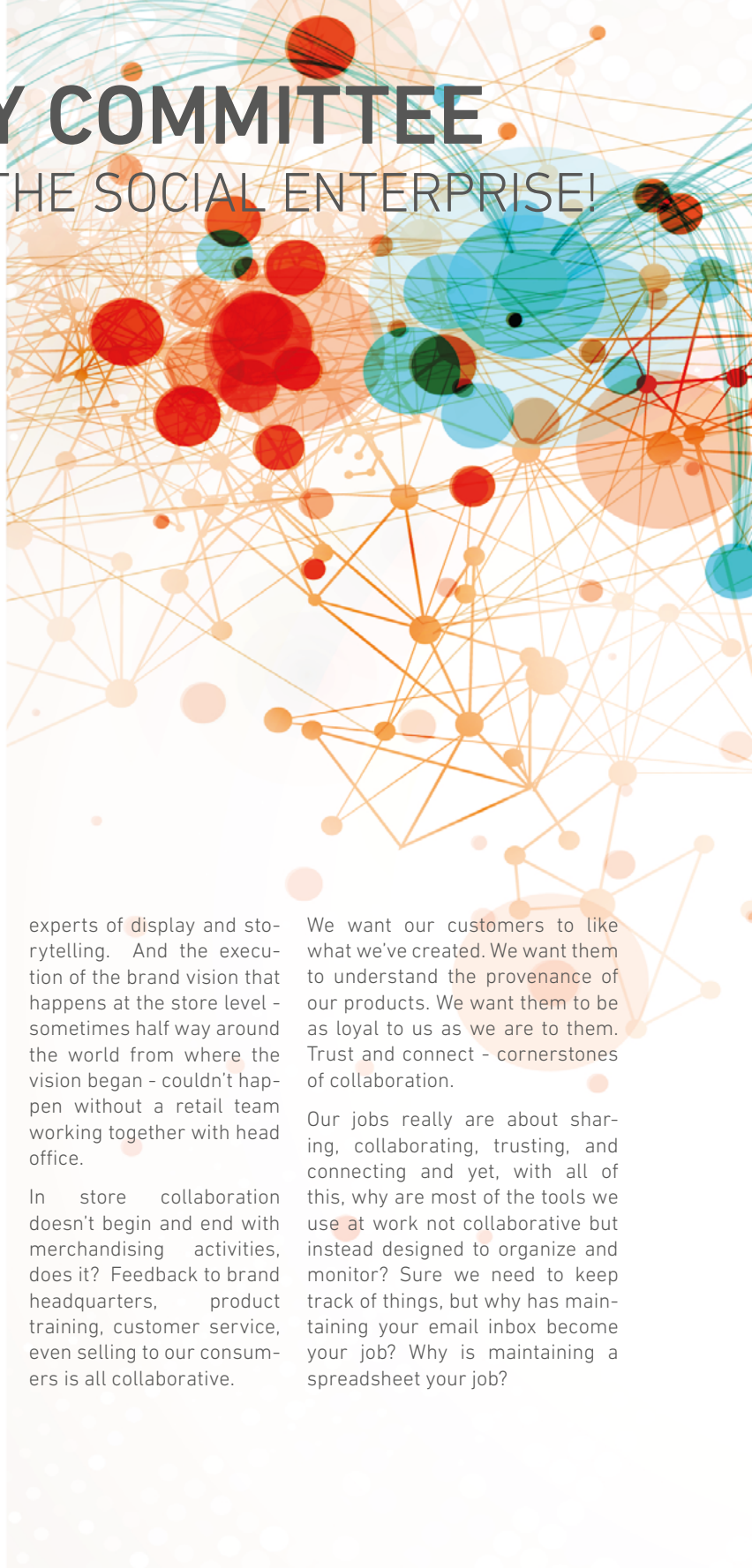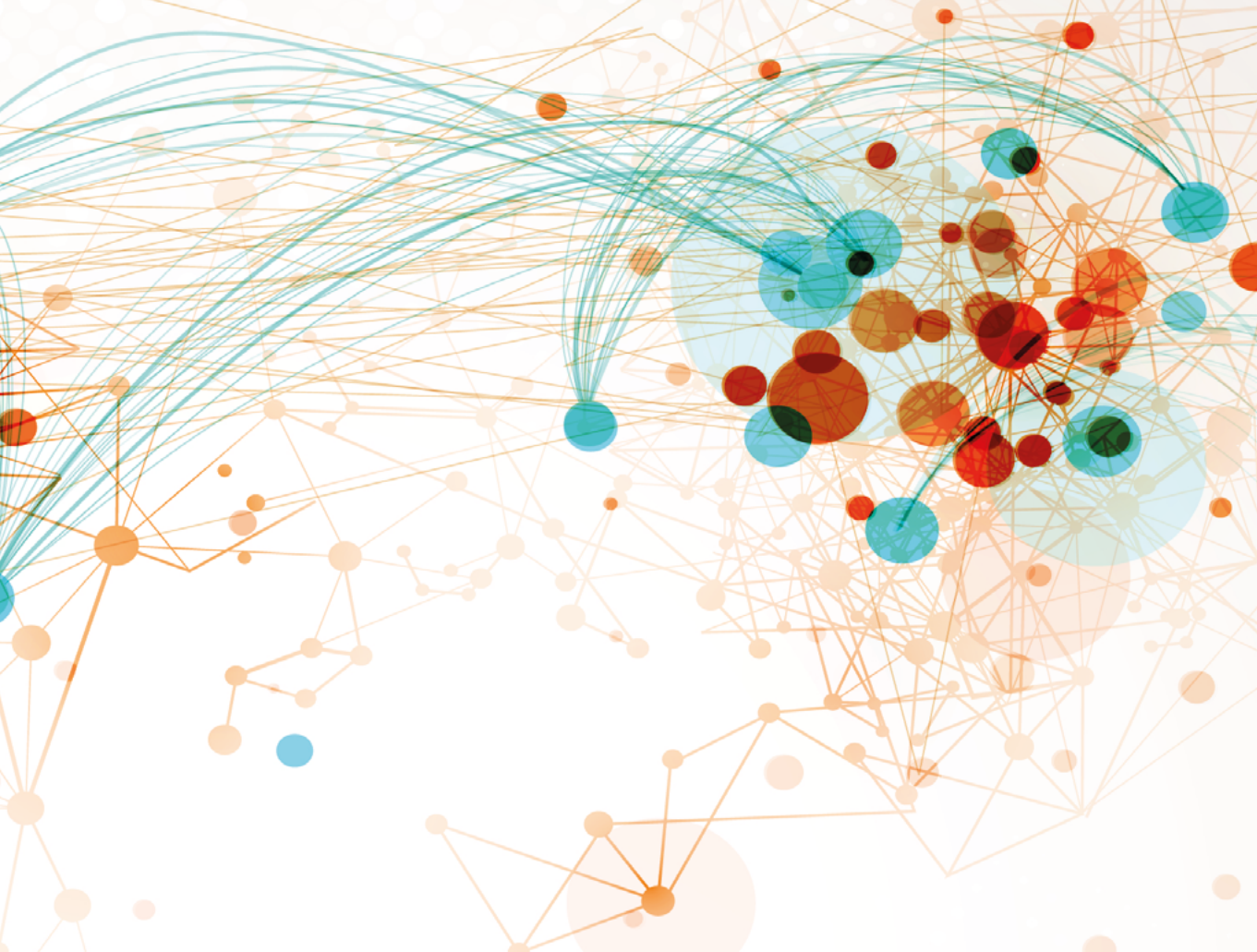
And why, at many brands, is PLM viewed as someone else's job—maintain the data hungry beast after the real collaborative work is done? Didn't we hire the people we hired because we want them to think and contribute?

Social media has forever changed the way we interact; dating, staying in touch with family, updating friends, even broadcasting ourselves to strangers. Digital is behaviour we cannot unlearn and now social is changing the way we work, as it should! Sharing pictures, videos, comments, ideas, likes, dislikes, successes, and failures are what our work is all about. Technology at work is finally catching up with how we truly collaborate.

How many of these tools do you recognize, and perhaps more importantly how many of these are already being used at your office (with or without IT's consent)?

Slack, Skype, Streak, Yammer: *Which is an online CRM tool?*

Pinterest, iPhoto, YouTube: *Do any of these not support video?*

Facebook, Chatter, WhatsApp: *Which offer instant messaging?*

As you enjoy this conference, explore what the social enterprise means to the other brands here. Explore what the social enterprise means to the technology vendors.

Examine where you are on this journey, and ask yourselves, "do we foster collaboration with the tools we give our employees?"