

# WWD

## Financo Forum Taking a Tech Turn

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By: David Moin

Gilbert Harrison has reinvented his Financo Forum, pushing aside the usual panel of department store veterans and merchant princes to bring on some modern-day Web geeks and social networkers.

“It’s a new world today,” said Harrison, chairman of Financo Inc. “It’s a panel that reflects the changes in retailing and the new consumer behavior.”

Financo forums have a reputation for stirring the pot, with Harrison historically stacking the panels with executives with opposing points of view. But Monday’s lineup seems rigged more for discussion than discord. Speakers include Tom Arrix, Facebook’s vice president of U.S. sales; Ben Fischman, chief executive of Rue La La; Daniel Schock, Google’s retail industry director, and Chip Wilson, founder, chairman, chief innovation and branding officer for Lululemon.

Harrison is even tempering his role, for the first time serving as co-moderator, along with Nicole Lapin, anchor for CNBC’s “Worldwide Exchange.” They’ll both be posing questions to the panel and the audience, which will be filled with the likes of Mindy Grossman, Lew Frankfort, Joe Gromek, Matt Rubel, Steve Madden, Mickey Drexler, Brendan Hoffman and Richard Baker.

“The idea is to bridge the gap between the old world and the new world and for people to understand the changes that affect their companies,” said Harrison. “We intend to touch on how companies have changed their marketing and branding strategies as a result of the growth of social networking and the new driving forces influencing consumer behavior.”

“It’s a whole new retail environment that has to be understood. The issues are, how do you reach the consumer today? How do you give them something different? What happens with traditional advertising and how does social networking affect it?”

After 21 years, Financo’s annual event remains one of retailing’s hottest tickets, with over 300 people expected tonight at the Harmonie Club. The event is held the same week as the National Retail Federation’s “Big Show” convention in New York. Right after Financo, many in the crowd will swing over to the Yale Club, where Mayor Bloomberg’s office is staging a meeting with about 100 retailers to discuss Fashion’s Night Out and other initiatives to spur business in the city.