

## ANALYSIS

From the value end to the premium, fashion retailers are increasingly upping their menswear game, writes **Becky Waller-Davies**

# Why retailers are banking on a growing menswear market



**M**enswear has traditionally been relegated to store basements, with retailers resigned to men simply being less interested in shopping. But while the market is still small fry compared with womenswear – John Lewis menswear head Nick Keyte has estimated that it is around a quarter of the size – many retailers, from high-end to value, are banking on its growth.

Consultancy Verdict Retail predicts that at the value end of the market, menswear will drive growth, outpacing womenswear by expanding 29.2% by 2021. General fashion sales are expected to grow 23.6% in that period.

Premium and designer retailers also hope to cash in on this shift: Net-a-Porter unveiled an own-brand menswear label in its strategic report last month, while in April Harvey Nichols relaunched the menswear department at its Knightsbridge store.

And Jigsaw boss Peter Ruis said in June that the premium fashion retailer would be expanding its standalone menswear stores from three to between 15 and 20.

So what is fuelling this growth? Men taking an interest in their appearance is hardly a new phenomenon.

Verdict analyst Kate Ormrod says: “Menswear has taken a back seat in the past decade as value retailers have focused on enhancing womenswear. However, as male interest in fashion and personal appearance builds, retailers are starting to respond to male consumers’ growing demands for more choice, style and newness.”

For Anders Kristiansen, chief executive of New Look, the difference is how many more men are tapping into trends and style.

“If you go back a few years and a guy was smartly dressed, he was called a metrosexual,” he says. “Today with Instagram and Facebook and Twitter, trends travel faster and we are seeing that more guys want to be fashionable.”

He adds: “We predicted a couple of years ago that the market would grow and we took that opportunity.”

But retailers that want to cash in on this growing interest cannot rely on applying womenswear tactics to menswear.

“When I arrived at New Look we had been selling menswear for about 10 years but it was an afterthought,” says Kristiansen. He recalls menswear sat alongside womenswear with little distinction between the two. He has now removed menswear from about 80 New Look

shops. “If we can’t do it credibly we don’t want to do it. We might miss out on sales but it is all about the brand,” he says.

He insists that menswear is an easier market to crack than womenswear. “Guys are simple creatures, they are predictable,” he says. “They are usually on more of a mission and don’t enjoy browsing. So they shop far less frequently, but the basket size is bigger.”

“Men’s fashion is also less impacted by the weather so it is an easier business to manage. Colours-wise, so long as you have black, grey, navy, white and add maroon for autumn/winter, you have it covered, and make less markdowns at the end of the season.”

Today, New Look has nine standalone menswear stores, and hopes to increase that number to 26 by the end of its financial year.

It is not the only retailer to have launched standalone menswear offerings. Inditex’s jewel-in-the-crown Zara launched Zara Man in the UK at the end of 2014, while value retailer Boohoo launched a standalone Boohoo Man website in April this year, building on its 2013 menswear launch.

Boohoo marketing director Richard Clark said at the time that the launch “felt like a natural progression” because of men beginning “to embrace fashion trends and move away from the safety net”.

This trend will surely only continue – retailers will hope that the menswear market is as easy to predict as Kristiansen believes that men are.

**“Today, trends travel faster and we are seeing that more guys want to be fashionable”**

**Anders Kristiansen,  
New Look**