

# A Great Fit

Suitsupply brings the digital experience into stores

by JOHN MORELL

Imagine pitching investors on a retail concept a decade ago: Men's suits and business wear for Millennials, sold both online and in-store. Then picture walking out empty-handed after receiving a lecture about how men under 40 don't wear suits anymore.

But they are. "Guys are wearing suits. They just don't want suits that make them look like their fathers," says Nick Botter, manager of marketing technology for Suitsupply, based in The Netherlands. "There is a strong market for suits today."

Sales statistics seem to prove Botter correct. While suit and sport coat sales lagged during the Great Recession — and the tech industry and other fields chose a "Casual Friday" ethos five days a week — sales of fine menswear jumped an average of 11 percent per year between 2009 and 2013, according to researcher Bain & Company.

And a recent study by HSBC points to the rise of the "Yummy" — young urban males with money and a taste for good clothing.

Suitsupply, founded in 2000 by Dutch businessman Fokke de Jong, has focused on capturing that emerging demographic. The company has made some high-profile moves, outfitting The Netherlands' teams for the opening ceremonies of the 2012 Olympics and creating some provocative ads in Europe, all designed to separate itself from the stodgy and sometimes intimidating image of a traditional suit store.

"Our customers are sophisticated and looking for something different," Botter says. "They want to stand out."



## ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

A plan was formulated early on by de Jong and his team to make omnichannel a reality. Suitsupply has some 75 bricks-and-mortar outlets open or planned around the globe, mainly in fashionable areas such as the five-star Shanghai Mansion hotel or on Los Angeles' trendy Abbot Kinney Boulevard.

"Our philosophy is to look at online sales to see where we need a bricks-and-mortar presence," Botter says. "If we see consistent sales in a certain postal code, we know we need to have a store there. And when we build a store, what's interesting is it doesn't take away from the online purchases from that area. We generally see them improve."

In early 2012, Suitsupply began working with Demandware to expand its online footprint and create an e-commerce platform that could seamlessly reach across international borders.

"What's interesting about Suitsupply is their vision of bringing digital into the store," says Elana Anderson,

"If we see consistent online sales in a certain postal code, we know we need to have a store there." — Nick Botter, Suitsupply

senior vice president of worldwide marketing for Demandware. "By combining the digital and in-store experience, they get a 360-degree view of the consumer, and their success shows."

Creating a free-flowing experience, whether consumers are in-store or online, is considered the ultimate customer relationship management goal for most retailers, and Suitsupply goes deep into building it. The company actively uses Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and email and video chat to connect with customers, powered by its Salesforce software.

"It's really essential in this area of men's clothing to engage with customers through various channels," Botter says. "Most people aren't going to order a suit from simply a webpage. It's an investment they need advice on



for the proper fit and look, and we can remotely deliver that.”

Suitsupply’s stylists learn about customers’ tastes and needs, he says, and create a “product center” that contains a variety of items. The products are shipped to customers, who can pay directly from social media with a payment link generated through Salesforce.

### ‘DIGITAL-FIRST’

“It’s a real challenge to take a product that’s been more successfully sold in bricks-and-mortar stores to one

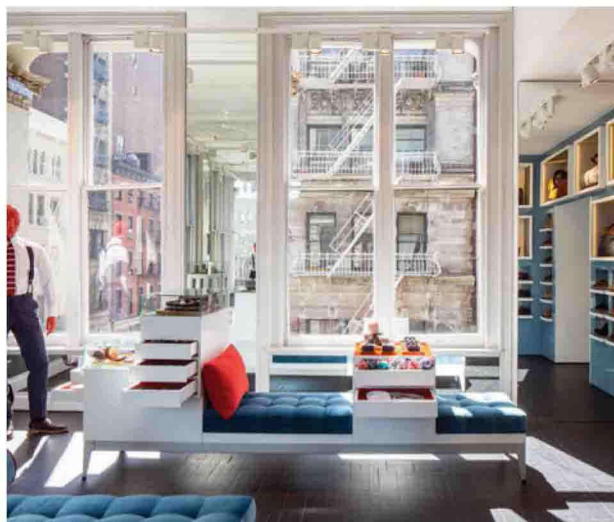
and bought a belt. “He then went home and looked at several suits on our site, then communicated with a stylist through WeChat who made some recommendations, and he went ahead and purchased six suits. He knew the sizes he wanted and just used the website to make his purchase because it was convenient to order via one of our stylists.”

Suitsupply has customer service centers in Amsterdam, Dallas and Shanghai. Through them, a customer can communicate via video chat with a stylist who will guide him through the

tomer with others around the world who are buying our products.”

The company studies how customers from different nations and cultures buy menswear and tries to adjust to those preferences. European customers, according to Botter, are interested in getting information upfront about how the company sells its products and what they can expect. American customers expect that Suitsupply knows all about what they want after they make a purchase.

“I was in our Dallas service center recently and watched as a stylist took a



that’s sold equally well online, but that’s what they’ve done,” says Shelley Bransten, senior vice president for retail at Salesforce.

“They’ve had a digital-first philosophy from the beginning and it’s paid off as technology has caught up with their vision.”

Digitizing the suit sales experience works best with someone who’s aware of their current chest, sleeve and waist sizes, and who has bought a suit recently. That’s not always the case, though, which is why Suitsupply turned its customer service department into a stylist department. All employees are required to attend “Suit School,” a three-day intensive workshop on suit design, fabrics and styles.

Botter describes a sale at the Shanghai store, where a customer visited

measurements. Aided by usage data and smart learning systems, the stylist can also offer recommendations. Alterations can be made at a Suitsupply outlet; if one is not close by, the stylist can recommend a local tailor.

### CONNECTING CONSUMERS

To emphasize the company’s digital connections, the company uses Salesforce’s Heroku platform to power video walls in each store.

“Our customers are interested in what’s in style and what people are buying. The video walls show real-time sales of various products worldwide,” Botter says. “They’ll also show our latest social media posts and real-time feedback we received from our customers about their experience at Suitsupply. It helps connect the cus-

customer’s call,” he says. “He had five suits in his online basket and just had a question about sizing. She looked him up and knew the sizes he wanted, and helped him make the purchase.”

The Suitsupply approach may be a sign of progress in e-commerce. “It used to be that retailers were worried about showrooming consumers, but companies like Suitsupply are embracing that approach,” Anderson says. “They’re telling people, ‘Connect with us in the store, online or both. We know what other people are selling: take a look at what we can do for you.’” **STORES**

**John Morell is a Los Angeles-based writer who has covered retail and business topics for a number of publications around the world.**