

TARGETING MALE SHOPPERS

Play to their new-found satisfaction with shopping by offering male customers a good selection of quality shirts.

By Sarah Haslerud, Fashion Editor

So often fashion and style are associated with women's apparel. But recently, the tide has shown a distinct change, and it appears that men are becoming more aware of fashion, trends and shopping in general.

Historically, men have been the "direct shopper," seeing a need for something, going into the store, bee-lining it to the item they need, paying and getting out of the store. However, recent studies have shown that men are viewing shopping with less stress and more satisfaction. A study by Fizzback, a customer engagement service, showed that 22 percent of men give positive feedback about their shopping experiences. Moreover, according to market researcher the NPD Group, men's apparel sales increased 1.6 percent in July, while women's fell 4.1 percent.

Men are viewing shopping as more of a mission and their purchases as a job well done, and are also more willing to say how satisfying their experience at your store made them feel. The fashion industry has taken the information in these studies to heart, and in response is beginning to give men's clothing more dimension and variety.

As part of the move toward fashion awareness, men are using their clothing more as a way to express themselves. They also want to buy quality-made items—investment pieces that will look good and last. According to Keith Munde of Rocky Mountain Clothing Company (RMCC), men are using their clothing to show their success, status and lifestyle. They are willing to spend a little more for something that makes them look good, feel good and will do both of those for a long while.

DESIGN

One of the most noticeable things a man wears is his shirt, and he knows it. Men want shirts that fit their needs and make them look good. The color and fabric design attract the eye first, and men are looking to see if they are going to be trendy, classic, casual or dressy. They want to make sure they are getting a good investment for their money.

As a retailer of riding apparel, catching the interest of buyers is your number one priority. Men's shirts are being made with this in mind. The colors and fabric designs are attracting attention with bright vibrant colors, plaids with interesting color combinations, shots of metallic thread and elaborate embroidery. Even scenery designs are within the broad spectrum of choices in today's shirt designs. On the other end of the spectrum are fine fabrics with a soft-to-the-touch high thread count and tonal colors giving a more sophisticated look, making these choices appealing to their new sense of style as well as their practical side. The fabrics are breathable, lightweight and easy to maintain—comfortable fabrics to ride in, work in or play in.

FIT

Fit is the second thing to go under inspection. Now that their interest has been piqued, men want to know that they are going to look good and feel good in their new

shirt or shirts. Is it too form fitting, is it too baggy? Does the fit work with a suit or sport jacket? Will it work for casual wear? They want the fit to be versatile and comfortable.

The fit of men's shirts has a spectrum of its own. Traditional cowboy cut shirts are tapered to the body, have longer sleeves and longer tails. These features come from the design of a mainstream dress shirt, as they are made to be worn under a suit jacket and tucked into slacks. Today, designers are incorporating traditional design features with the characteristics of the lifestyles within the equine industry.



Wrangler

For those men that ride and compete in the English disciplines, a fitted shirt is a must. Worn under a jacket, the shirt must be properly fitted and yet still be rugged enough and comfortable enough to withstand competing in the ring. According to company president Cathy Sacher, Essex Classics is taking into consideration that men get a workout in the ring but still need to look good in their competition gear. Essex shirts are being made with a slim cut that is tapered through the body, button-down collars and fabrics that keep the wearer cool and dry.

Western-lifestyle shirts are being designed to fit men who want a variety of dif-

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