



# Office Office

With more women entering the workforce, corporate wear in both the men and women's segments have seen an upward turn. **Bindu Gopal Rao** gives you an overview.

**T**he apparel market accounts for six per cent of India's consumption expenditure and is expected to grow fourfold over the next decade, with an estimated consumption expenditure of \$225 billion (around ₹ 12.4 trillion today) in 2020, according to a 2012 report by Boston Consulting Group (BCG). India's overall retail sector is currently valued at about \$500 billion and is estimated to reach \$1.3 trillion by 2020, according to a 2012 report by Pricewaterhouse Coopers. Naturally then, the apparel market is both



with a range of sub labels shows the distinct demand for particular styles and price points. In terms of women's wear with a more westernised scenario in the work space, fashion is also getting a more standardised style. Many work spaces has specific colour codes as well uniforms, which contributes to the corporate binding and organisational institutionalisation," explains designer Aniket Satam.

Jackets are a big trend now as are the demand for stoles and small-width shawls. Trousers are in great demand and more detailed style lines are introduced



lucrative and attractive, and is seeing an influx of brands—both national and international—making their foray into the market. Office wear as a segment is also doing exceeding well, considering the influx of young people entering the corporate fold.

### MARKET POTENTIAL

Sanjay Dalmia, President and MD, Prateek Apparels, opines, "Menswear today takes the chunk of both organised and unorganised retail, constituting 40 per cent of the market share. Women's wear contributes 35 per cent. Menswear is currently the fastest growing apparel

category according to industry estimates. This is primarily driven by growth in youth and casual wear, greater fashion awareness across metros, tier II and tier III cities, and lower entry barriers of design product development and raw material. There is also greater product and size standardisation in menswear which leads to a higher pace of emergence of organised retail."

With MNCs proliferating and new corporate parks opening up in two-tiered cities, formal clothing has gone through a fashion revolution. "An array of men's shirt brands solely coming



every season. Sleek, smart and well-tailored pieces have great demand, which are basic and functional, and one can easily dress it up and layer their individual looks. Vandy Mehra, Director, Pret Study By Janak Fashion Pvt Ltd—the company operates Study By Janak, a premium store for stylised wear as well as SBJ house of luxury in India—says "Surprisingly for men, it's getting better with time; they are becoming more experimental with the looks and fabric and even with prints. They are ready to look at new fabrics or prints. For women, they have always been experimental, but now there is a lot of international influence we see in terms of

their likes and trends they want to follow. It's not a strict boardroom look; now they are ready to bring in their feminine side to it as well."

Gurprit Singh Sawhney, Promoter Trendy Divva, adds, "The formal wear is picking up fast; for our Spring/Summer collection we have launched a formal line in chiffon and georgette with different, comfortable cuts which are easy-to-wear all day long. We have designed shirts with ruffles and embroideries, in prints and solids. For formal wear, we have to adopt strict quality control measures and the collection has to be fashion forward.



There is a lot of potential to be tapped in this segment with the growing needs of consumers for stylish corporate wear."

### NEW VISTAS

According to fashion designer Rohini Gugnani, Habillez Moi, "Formal wear is now no longer associated only with formal occasions, but includes office wear as well. For girls, straight-cut trousers are the perfect choice as office wear. Skirts are another popular choice in the corporate world. Skirts, especially straight styles, such as pencil skirts, should be loose enough to sit down in comfortably. You can mix and match a



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skirt with blazer or a black coat." For men, the classic men's shirt has become more fitted and streamlined and is worn with well-structured pants with narrow hems. "Stripes are back in vogue in a broader and bolder avatar unlike the fine pin-stripes version. Checks are finer and more graphic in nature winning over the classic checkered patterns. Polo t-shirts, golf tees and pair of crisp chinos or khaki pants make a smart choice for un-expected golf meetings," opines Satam.

Says Punit Agarwal, CEO, Promart Retail India Pvt Ltd, "In men's corporate wear, textures in fabric, different weaves

and inner casual detailing are being experimented with. More than ever, Indian consumers are experimenting with combining styles, as seen in the recent Indo-fusion boom which mixes the silhouettes of the East with the comfort cut of the West. In the corporate women's wear segment, we have seen pencil skirts, formal tees, well-tailored trousers taking over preferences." Cotton, linen and chiffon dominate the corporate look in all shapes and forms. "These are chic materials that represent the mood of the collections perfectly—light, pleasurable yet somewhat minimal. It is advisable for solids—the five basic shades of black, brown, navy, gray, camel or white—when it comes to selecting suits, pants or skirts. Also, it is always best to opt for the neutral colours like black, brown, beige and tan," says Swikriti Gaur, Senior Designer, Bombay High Fashions.



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## WHAT WOMEN WANT

The women's corporate wear segment is a fairly new category which is emerging primarily due to the needs of women working in the multinational and corporate segment. While saris and *salwar kameez* are considered acceptable formal wear in most organisations, western corporate wear is emerging as a suitable alternative. According to a new research report by RNCOS, the women's wear market in the country has taken a new dimension with the entry of several new as well as foreign brands. It is anticipated that the Indian women's wear market, which is worth around ₹540 Billion, will expand at a CAGR of more than 11 per cent during 2012-2015. Ethnic wear is one of the fastest growing segments in the apparel market." Denim wear will lead the western wear market. The presence of brands in this segment is still limited.



Trendy Divya

Park Avenue Woman

**“ WASHED-OUT VINTAGE WALLPAPER PRINTS ALONG WITH DAINTY GRANNY PATTERNS ARE IN TREND IN MORE SEMI-TRANSPARENT FORMS. ”**

Most women's corporate brands have their roots in parent menswear brands like Arrow, Van Heusen and Park Avenue. Private labels of departmental stores play an important role in offering a good variety of options at sharp prices. The brand awareness of this segment being low, private labels are a good entry point for customers. Greater standardisation of fits and sizing, wider product range and evolving consumer tastes will decide the future of this category," opines Dalmia. Conventional *kurtas* have now converted into easy-to-wear tunics. Thus, labels like Biba and 109F are doing well in this category, providing new styles which are easy to wear on a pair of trousers, denims and leggings.

Smart cotton shirts with panel construction, with feminine details like puff sleeves, pin-tucks, patterned yokes and gatherings are in trend. Washed-out vintage wallpaper prints along with dainty granny patterns are in trend in more semi-transparent forms. "Today,

women are looking for fashion formals. There is a large scope in women's corporate wear owing to the wider range of attire that fall under this heading, ranging from dresses, suits, shirts and skirts. There's a lot to do in women's formal wear in India, as it's still at a nascent stage. There's constant evolution and addition that is slowly but gradually revamping the concept of corporate wear for women," adds Gaur.

## PRICING STRATEGIES

Functional yet affordable price points rule the roost since the market being targeted has a high disposable income. "People are spoilt for choice and are also looking for major wardrobe changes every three months or so, as one ends up meeting the same set of people over period of few days. More than exclusivity, people are looking for comfort and quality," says Satam. "The market that understands this trend of corporate wear is more sophisticated, so a higher

pricing or a premium over the rate is easily accepted," opines Mehra.

Rising input costs and the availability of choice have ensured that prices remain highly competitive in this segment for brands to attract customers. "This is reflected in the higher contributions of the end-of-season sales and growth in discount stores such as Coupon and Brand Factory," says Dalmia. Branding is the way forward in corporate wear and the market is all set to see sustained growth which spells good news for markets and customers alike. ♣



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