

Taking the online way!

Bindu Gopal Rao explores the opportunities online portals offer to budding designers and the overall impact they generate.



Fashion e-commerce in India is booming, to say the least. According to statistics, by 2020, India is expected to generate US\$ 100 billion online retail revenue out of which US\$ 35 billion will be through fashion e-commerce. Online apparel sales itself are all set to grow four times in the coming years. Added to this, what is also growing is the trend of online portals becoming an avenue for budding designers to come to the forefront.

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

Since an online store has access to the world as a market, it opens the world market as an avenue for the designer. It also helps bring name and fame to the new designer. "Along with this, it also creates opportunities for a local designer to go international and explore fashion shows worldwide. An online apparel store can help

upcoming international designers reach out to the Indian market. Designers from small towns in the country who do not have the financial backing to put up a physical store in a commercially viable location can get visibility with the help of online apparel stores," says Farzad, Owner and Founder, The Muslin Bag—a new online portal featuring upcoming designers across the world. Likewise, the country's largest online retailer Myntra is also working towards this cause. Founded in January 2015, Myntra Fashion Incubator (MFI) is a first of its kind initiative by any fashion retailer/brand in India to support entrepreneurship in the business of fashion. Through this programme, Myntra focuses on offering support to budding designers who possess creativity and are motivated to convert their ideas into a scalable business opportunity. The MFI programme recently

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concluded its first edition with seven budding fashion designers. These designers underwent intense training at Myntra under the guidance of industry experts and celebrated fashion designers such as Rahul Mishra, Kallol Datta and Rohit Gandhi, amongst others. Few of these budding designers have recently launched brands catering to different categories such as apparel for men, women and kids. From traditional designs to quirky prints and hi-street fashion, these brands have created something for everyone. Under the MFI programme, young designer Harleen started Pluie as she wanted to revive the age-old tradition of mothers and grandmothers hand-stitching clothes for their little ones. Pluie is an extension of that lifestyle by using cotton-based fabrics and silhouettes that are airy and fluffy. The collection comprises of tunics, tops and dresses for kids.

SHOWCASING AVENUES

Some online apparel stores set pop-ups to showcase new designers. This is an activity done initially to create awareness. Online apparel stores also set up digital magazines to showcase new designers and their work. "Giving individuals an opportunity for styling on the online apparel stores has led people to turn to new designers. Online apparel brands also have their own blogging section; they look for new talent and designers and write articles on them. This creates a lot of visibility to the audience of fashion trends and the designers behind the trend," adds Farzad. Abhishek Verma, Head of Myntra Fashion Brands, explains, "MFI is a unique platform for young entrepreneurs and designers with the opportunity to turn their fashion designs and ideas into a sustainable business venture. Under the 'Designer in Residence' (DIR) program of MFI, we have provided mentorship, infrastructure and capital support to the eight selected applicants for a year and have assisted them in curating their own fashion label. The idea behind setting up the MFI is to mentor young talent who do not have access to industry expertise, capital, supply chain and distribution platforms, and empower them to create sizeable indigenous fashion brands in the long run. This is also an attempt to strengthen



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our commitment of building sustainable and aspirational fashion brands within the country. Besides MFI, we have always encouraged entrepreneurship within the company and we nurture a culture where employees enjoy the liberty of owning a project and ensuring it is a success."

IN-HOUSE BRANDING

Red Polka, an online fashion curating portal, is designed keeping in mind its two most important stakeholders – customers and designers. "The business model is all about discovering beautifully done designs for women shoppers who are design and aesthetically conscious. At Red Polka, we provide a platform for designers to showcase their work for the shoppers. We curate the best of products from their latest collection and showcase them under a new edition every week. With Red Polka as their show window, our designers have been able to increase their customer base from a locality to pan India. We started operations in January, this year, with three designers and we are ending the year with 150 designers on board," says Vishakha Singh, Founder and CEO, Red Polka. The online

fashion discovery portals will drive the fashion e-commerce industry in India as more and more women get online, their shopping habits will shape this industry. The onus is on players like us to discover more and more designers for women shoppers who are fashion-conscious. Another trend being seen is to showcase in-house brands that add the tag of exclusivity. Once a brand has created a presence in the online market, they tend to create products/apparel under their own brand name. "This is because after a certain period, the customers demand in-house products of the brand itself. This is after they have gained trust in the brand. Also, most in-house brands are created exclusively after they receive a good response from a survey conducted or from recurring customers. The online apparel brands also create in-house brands based on the fashion trends and the demand of the audience. They create such in-house brands to meet the demands of the ever growing fashion industry," explains Farzad.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

The online apparel business in India is growing very fast. According to Google, every third



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shopping search on Google in India is fashion related and the queries in the same category are growing at the rate of 66 per cent, year on year. With online shopping being a more convenient way to shop, the number of people resorting to the Internet to shop for fashion related products has increased. Online stores have started selling exclusive products on their website which may now not be available in the same brick and mortar store. India is expected to generate US\$ 35 billion revenue through fashion e-commerce alone, by the year 2020. With telecom companies and the major digital companies such as Facebook and Google looking to reach out to more and more people to access the Internet, the online apparel shopping rate is only going to rise higher. The number of online shoppers in India is set to grow from 40 million now to 250 million by 2020. The country is set to witness 500 million Internet users by the year 2018. With the world



going digital and the ever-increasing growth in technology, online shopping is only going to get bigger. Myntra currently has a total of seven brands under the MFI program including Vaishvik—t-shirts and sweatshirts for men and women; Pluie—a kids' wear brand; SUO—a women's wear brand; Mr Bowerbird—men's wear apparel; Encrypt—women's western wear; and Lokal South—a women's western wear brand. "Clothing for women in India is multi-faceted, with many options and occasions to purchase. Almost all Indian women in urban households have more than one variety of clothing. She may have at least two different types of clothing, from a range of *lehengas*, saris, *salwar* suits, dresses, trousers, and jackets. This makes it a hugely demanding market segment. Online presence gives an opportunity to create communities of similar aesthetic sense and expands the reach," explains Vishakha. ■