

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Size inclusivity presents big opportunity for luxury fashion

May 24, 2018



11 Honor carries designer fashion up to size 20. Image credit: 11 Honor

By SARAH JONES

The market for plus-size clothing is booming, opening up opportunities for luxury brands and retailers that cater to the demand for a wider range of sizes.

Subscribe to **Luxury Daily**
Plus: Just released
State of Luxury 2019 **Save \$246 ▶**

Today in the United States, 67 percent of women wear a size 16 or above, but this significant portion of the population has typically been underserved by the fashion industry. A number of players are looking to change this, putting pressure on the broader industry to change.

"There's tremendous opportunity in this space 67 percent of women fall into this category," said Patrick Herning, co-founder and CEO of **11 Honor**, Los Angeles. "According to NPD Group, sales of women's plus-size clothing hit \$21.4 billion in 2016.

"These consumers want the same options, and are demanding the same level of luxury as straight-sized women," he said. "Brands that are not catering to this shopper are missing out on a tremendous opportunity."

Plus-size potential

According to NPD Group, U.S. consumers spent \$21 billion on plus-size fashion in 2016, and the market is growing faster than the overall apparel business with a CAGR of 4 percent through 2020.

A Hanes study found that about a third of women are plus-size by 25, and that portion rises to 44 percent by age 33.

However, despite the fact that the average American woman is a 16 or 18, many designers and retailers do not offer a wide variety of styles in these sizes. A report from Coresight Research attributes this to brands not believing that dressing curvier women fits within their image.

"In our recent [report](#) on the plus-size market, we noted that women who wear plus sizes have been vocal in recent years, particularly on social media, about their desire to buy fashionable, trendy clothes in the same fabrics and styles as offered in so-called straight sizes," said Deborah Weinswig, founder/CEO of **Coresight Research**, New York. "Social media influencers and the rise of the body positivity movement have contributed to shifting cultural attitudes toward those who wear plus sizes, and retailers and designers that have prioritized their plus-size offerings have

seen success in recent years.

"The fashion industry, too, has been long been accused of treating plus-size shoppers as an afterthought because of designers' perceptions that clothes do not look as flattering on plus-size people and that offering plus sizes negatively affects a brand's image," she said. "Industry perceptions that plus-size women were less willing to spend on expensive apparel have also long bubbled under the surface the thinking was that plus-size women might lose weight, and that they would not want to spend much on clothing that would fit them only for a short time."

Women who wear plus sizes often find it challenging to find designs in the same trends, fabrications and styles as those available in straight sizes.

Plus sizes are often placed in a separate, smaller department in the back of a store. Shoppers who wear plus sizes show an interest in buying more clothing, but they tend to be presented with limited options.

Some retailers are the ones leading the charge in changing the attitude toward plus-size fashion, convincing brands to get on board and produce in sizes 14 and up.

For instance, when Rent the Runway launched a plus-size section, the designs from Badgley Mischka and Carmen Marc Valvo were made in sizes 14 to 22 exclusively for the rental service.

Introducing: RTR Plus from Rent The Runway

Department store chain Nordstrom has launched a campaign to get brands to make clothes in more sizes. As part of the effort, the retailer is stocking more merchandise in women's sizes 00, 0, 12, 14, 16 and 18.

Typically, misses sizes span from 2 to 12, while plus sizes are available in 18 to 24. But Nordstrom found that some of the best-selling sizes, including 14 and 16, were not being made by many brands.

Originally launched in the retailer's Century City store in Los Angeles, the initiative recently rolled out to 30 stores, with more than 100 brands participating, including Rebecca Taylor, Theory, Nike and Adidas.

Nordstrom is working to get its European brands involved in the size inclusive offer. Within two years, Nordstrom is aiming to only sell brands that offer sizes 00 to 24 ([see story](#)).



Nordstrom is being size inclusive with its mannequins. Image credit: Nordstrom

This fall, the department store will debut new mannequins in a range of sizes, reflecting a diversity of body types. The store is also bringing sizes together in the same department, allowing women of all shapes and sizes to shop together.

"We recognized the opportunity to offer more sizes and to integrate them all together, rather than put them in a separate department," said Tricia Smith, executive vice president of women's apparel at **Nordstrom**, Seattle.

"Our customer has told us that she wants more sizes in the brands she loves, not necessarily more plus-size brands," she said. "Online shopping results informed us too. Customers filter by size online and we recognized the opportunity to add more sizes on both sides of the spectrum.

"We want to serve customers on their terms, and having their size is a big part of that of that focus," she said.

Similarly to Nordstrom, size-inclusive e-tailer 11 Honor seeks to fill a need for designer fashion in more sizes. Founded by fashion industry veterans Mr. Herning and Kathryn Retzer, the platform delivers runway fashion from brands such as Michael Kors, Marchesa, Zac Posen and Naeem Khan in sizes 10 to 24.

"Our goal is to disrupt the way that fashion approaches this underserved woman and provide her with the most diverse and stylish options out there," Mr. Herning said. "11 Honor is giving her a world that is more reflective of her, and we believe that every woman deserves access to great fashion and an extraordinary shopping experience.

"We want to change the high-end fashion conversation to be more inclusive, elevated and thoughtful."

As part of its efforts, 11 Honor is giving smaller brands resources to help them produce for plus sizes.

"11 Honor found that the primary obstacle isn't necessarily with the designer," Mr. Herning said. "Many of our designers have been working with our customer through trunk shows or private appointments.

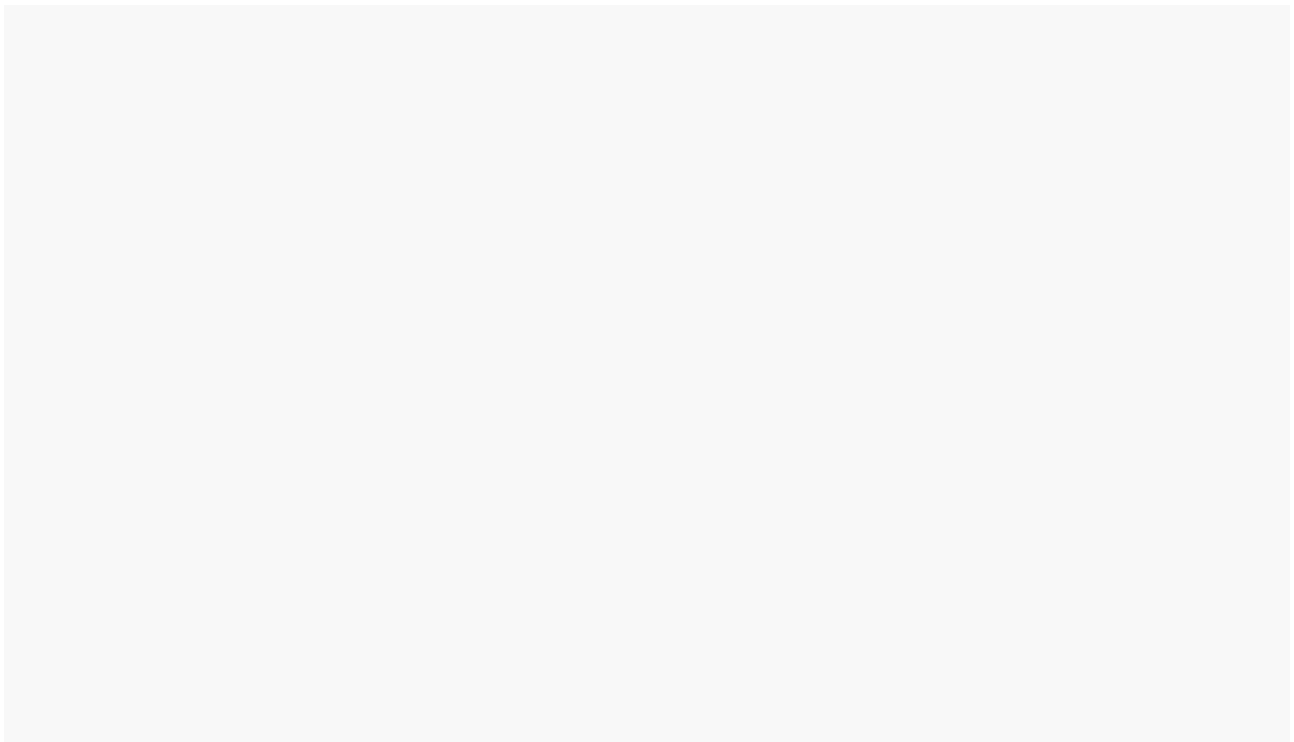
"The hesitation is with retailers who are not stocking or requesting larger sizes," he said.

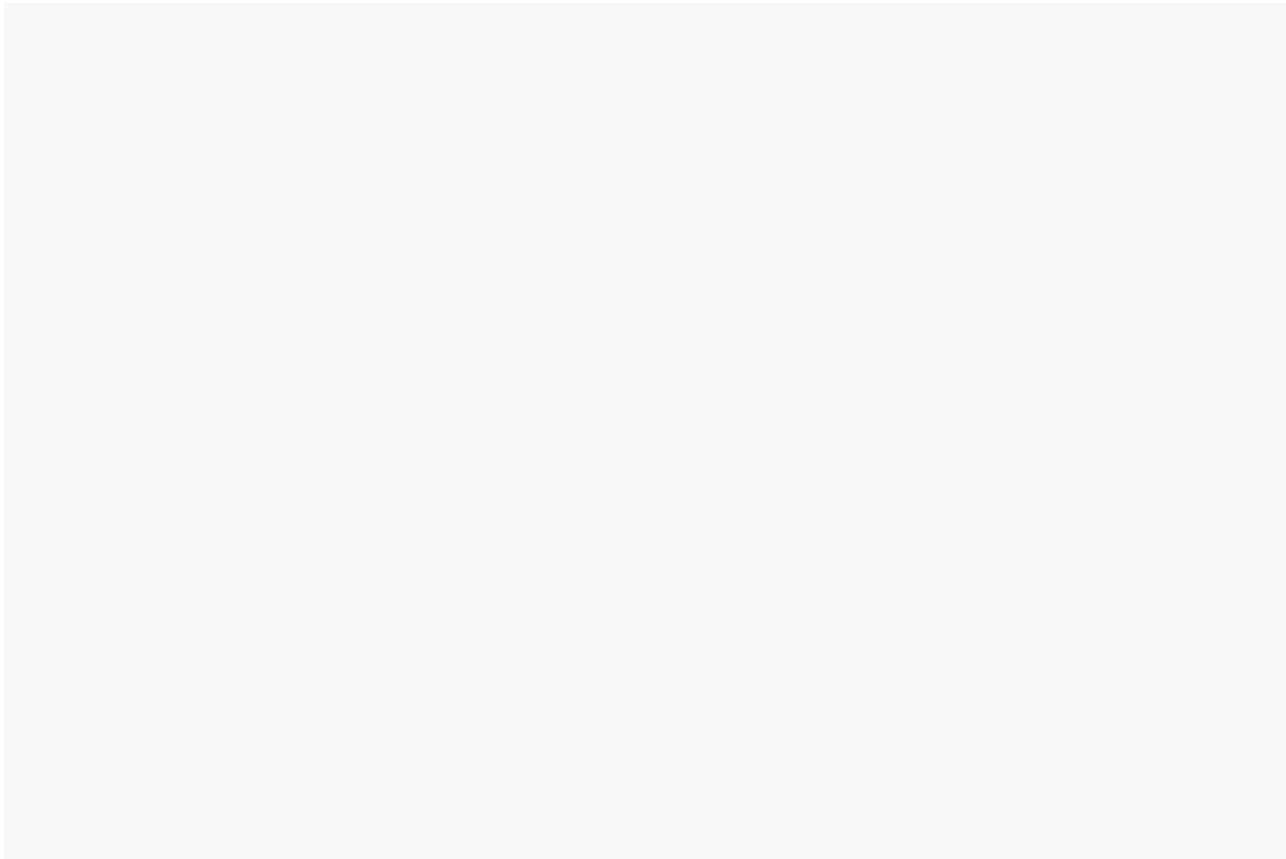
Attitude shift

Beyond retail, there is a lack of size inclusivity in brand-celebrity relationships. Actresses including Leslie Jones and Melissa McCarthy have noted the challenge of getting brands to lend samples beyond a size 0 or 2.

One designer who has adopted a size-inclusive approach is Christian Siriano. When Ms. Jones complained publicly about not being able to find a brand to dress her for the premiere of her film "Ghostbusters," Mr. Siriano came through with a bespoke creation.

The designer has also made his runway shows size inclusive, starting with the spring/summer 2017 presentation.





For today's Powerful Profile we sat down with @csiriano, the designer focused on creating lasting change in the fashion industry. Read more at the link in bio. #11honor #luxurywithoutlimits

A post shared by 11 Honor (@11honore) on May 3, 2018 at 11:59am PDT

Instagram post from 11 Honor

Overall, the major fashion weeks are gaining size diversity, with The Fashion Spot's analysis of the spring/summer 2018 shows calling it a "banner year" for plus-size inclusion on runways. During New York Fashion Week, 90 plus-size models were seen on catwalks, up from just 26 the previous season.

"We think there could be a significant opportunity awaiting for the first luxury brand that is seen to take a more inclusive stance including, but not limited to, plus-size shoppers," Coresight Research's Ms. Weinswig said.

"Luxury shoppers' profiles and expectations are changing," she said. "Millennial consumers look more likely than other generations to reward those brands that take a positive stand on diversity and inclusion.

"We have already seen mass-market brands gain much credibility by embracing nontraditional models in their marketing, and we see some opportunities for luxury brands to selectively do so, too."

Some high-fashion brands have dipped their toe into extended sizing.

French fashion designer Jean Paul Gaultier teamed with singer Beth Ditto on a special-edition tee.

The Beth Ditto Jean Paul Gaultier tee is an oversized, dress-length shirt with a screen printing of Mr. Gaultier's iconic bullet bra bustier. While designers collaborate with peers and friends quite often, this partnership was groundbreaking as it marked the first time any piece designed by Mr. Gaultier besides bespoke orders would be made up to a size U.S. 30 ([see story](#)).

Magazines are also reflecting a more size-diverse approach. *Vogue* cast Ashley Graham for the cover of model-centric issue in 2017, making her the first plus-size model to be featured on the front of the magazine.

"There's a lot of opportunity for luxury brands and all brands to be more inclusive and make more sizes," Nordstrom's Ms. Smith said. "We're excited about the progress we've made but there's a lot more opportunity.

"The industry really needed a retailer to be customer centric and ask for more sizes and to say it's not ok to not offer

more sizes," she said. "We have the data that shows that some of the best selling sizes are 0, 00, 14, 16 and 18.

"Someone needed to bring this issue forward as a priority and ask for a solution. It's been hard work. For some brands, they've added one size at a time, but we're focused and inspired and we're making progress. The operative word is progress."

© 2020 Napean LLC. All rights reserved.

Luxury Daily is published each business day. Thank you for reading us. Your [feedback](#) is welcome.