

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Men outspend women now on apparel and footwear. Is your store connecting with them?

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Although women run the show when it comes to consumer spending – making **85 percent** of household purchasing decisions in the United States – men's spending patterns are changing and offer a bright spot in an otherwise lackluster retail environment.

A 2016 study found that **men were already outspending women on clothing** and that the market for menswear is growing twice as fast as the women's wear market and is projected to be worth **\$33 billion by 2020**.

As major omnichannel retailers work to better **reach male shoppers**, online sellers must keep up to remain competitive. Here are a half-dozen ways to reach this growing market:

Follow the influencers

Two big drivers of change in men's shopping habits are that more men are getting their fashion inspiration from social media, and dress codes at work are more relaxed than a generation ago.

Those two factors mean that men now feel free to change up their wardrobe to dress more like their favorite athletes and entertainers or to look more professional.

In fact, despite the popular notion that many women love shoe shopping, men are now **on track to outspend women on shoes**, mostly to add variety to their work wardrobes.

Smart sellers will research which social media channels their best customers follow, take note of what they like, and adjust the product mix and marketing as needed.

Offer a generous return policy

Researchers have found that in general, **men are more likely to buy clothing and shoes in-store** rather than online, because they want to get a sense of how the items feel before they buy. Hassle-free return policies make shoppers feel more confident ordering items that they have not seen in person. And because companies such as Nordstrom and Zappos offer easy free returns, consumers are coming to expect other online sellers to do the same.

Make the customer experience as mobile-friendly as possible

There is one group of men who shop online almost as much as women: Millennials.

Forty-seven percent of men ages 22 to 37 **shop “frequently or very frequently” on their phones**, close to the 50 percent of millennial women who do so.

As mobile commerce grows more popular with younger consumers, it is critical that online sellers keep up with **mobile retail best practices** such as user-friendly site navigation and customer service, low-friction checkout, and mobile-specific fraud protection.

Be patient

Despite their adoption of social media for fashion cues, men do not yet rush to buy new items as soon as they hit the market in the same way that many women do.

More than half of women's online clothing buys are items released within the past three months, whereas only 39 percent of men's purchases are for items released so recently.

To cater to men's buying timetables, ecommerce stores can focus a bit less on having the next new thing immediately and factor in a longer time for new men's items to sell.

Go upscale

Despite millennials' post-Great Recession reputation as extremely frugal, this generation is now **driving growth in luxury retail**, including **luxury menswear**.

As with mass-market menswear, the most successful online sellers will keep an eye on social media trends and conversations while allowing for a longer purchasing cycle with their male customers.

Because luxury items are always a target for fraudsters, ecommerce sellers who add luxury items to their stores also need to develop fraud-prevention programs that screen out attempts at theft while ensuring that legitimate customers are recognized and treated well.

Do not overlook grooming and personal care

Men are not just buying more clothing and shoes.

The **men's grooming products market** is growing at slightly more than 5 percent year over year and will top \$60 billion by 2020. That is because young men today spend more than previous generations on personal care and cosmetic items such as hair styling products, anti-aging serums and creams, sun protection, and bronzers, concealers, and other makeup.

CoreSight Research reports that the shaving category is growing more slowly than fragrances and toiletries, which includes hair- and skincare products.

Because most men make their grooming purchases in-store, online sellers must make it easy and appealing for customers to try new grooming items.

Grooming samples with each purchase – a tactic used by Sephora, Ulta and other major beauty retailers – are an easy way to get new products into the hands of customers.

AS THE RETAIL landscape shifts and grows more competitive, building strong relationships with male consumers can help smaller players succeed.

Understanding what motivates today's men to shop, how they make purchasing decisions, and what items appeal to them most are the keys to winning and keeping this group of customers.

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