

FASHION MARKETING AND MERCHANDISING

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The goal of fashion marketing and merchandising, for both manufacturers and retailers, is to sell merchandise at a profit. This requires careful planning and coordination.

In ancient times, people “shopped” in open-air markets and bazaars, finding not only necessities but also products that were unique and gave excitement to their everyday lives. Today, we shop and buy in much the same way, but open-air markets and bazaars have evolved into department and specialty stores, discount outlets, and huge malls that continue to excite and entice the shopper. The difference is that fashion marketing and fashion merchandising are now the watchwords of successful fashion businesses. In the early twenty-first century, the customer has become the most important ingredient in successful fashion retailing. Determining the needs and wants of the targeted customer has become very important, and this challenge has led to the creation of specific goods and stores for specific categories of customers.

For many years, fashion producers were concerned only with what was economical and easy for them to produce. They would spend considerable time and money trying to convince the consumer that what they produced was what the consumer wanted. The fashion producer had little or no interest in the needs and wants of the consumer. However, marketing proved so successful in the growth of consumer goods such as automobiles, packaged foods, and health and beauty aids that it was eventually adopted by the fashion businesses. Under the classic definition of marketing, the key task of the organization is to determine the needs and wants of target markets and adapt the organization to deliver the desired satisfactions more effectively and efficiently to the ultimate customer.

Through the use of sophisticated marketing techniques such as focus groups, surveys, data mining, and market segmentation along with systematic approaches such as electronic data information (EDI), inventory tracking, and constant evaluation of advertising results for determining consumer tastes, the industry’s awareness of the importance of pleasing the target customer has greatly increased. Every step—design, production, distribution, promotion—is geared to consumer demand.

“Fashion marketing” includes all of the activities involved from conceiving a product to directing the flow of goods from producer to the ultimate customer. Activities of marketing include product development, pricing, promotion, and distribution. If a fashion retailer or manufacturer is to make a profit, the firm must have a product that consumers perceive as desirable, and the product must be presented to potential customers in a way that makes them want to buy it.

The first step in a fashion marketing approach is to define the company’s target customers, those persons the company most wants to attract as customers. Fashion marketers determine their target customer’s needs and wants by examining various market segments, identified by geographics, demographics, psychographics, and behavioral studies. Fashion marketers also track trends in population growth and diversity. Changing patterns of immigration bring with them new influences from different parts of the world. Products that will meet the needs and desires of these customers are then developed or selected. Most fashion manufacturers and retailers recognize that following a consumer-marketing approach leads to a profitable business.

“Fashion merchandising” is defined as the buying and selling of goods for the purpose of making a profit. Merchandising is the planning involved in marketing the *right* merchandise at the *right* price at the *right* time in the *right* place and in the *right* quantities. Commonly known as the 5Rs, merchandising is concerned with all the activities necessary to provide customers with the merchandise they want to buy, when and where they want to buy it, and at prices they can afford and are willing to pay. This includes making buying plans, understanding the customer, selecting the merchandise, and promoting and selling the goods to the consumer.

Fashion merchandising is practiced by both manufacturers and retailers. For manufacturers, merchandising begins with estimating consumer demand in terms of styles, sizes, colors,

quantity, and price. Merchandising also involves designing the goods and selecting the fabrics and findings, designing the packaging, pricing, advertising, and other sales promotion activities.

For fashion retailers, merchandising also begins with forecasting the needs and wants of their target customer. The retailer must first project sales in terms of dollars and units of merchandise. Just as the manufacturer must anticipate the needs of the retailer, the retailer must also anticipate the needs of the consumer by reviewing past sales, keeping up on trends, and knowing where on the fashion cycle their customer falls. The retailer must also know what colors, sizes, styles, and prices of merchandise that their target customers want to purchase. After planning what and how much to buy, merchandising for the fashion retailer includes determining resources from which to purchase, selecting from their assortments, and purchasing the goods for sale to the consumer. Another factor of merchandising is presenting the merchandise attractively and effectively to the consumer and promoting the merchandise so that the target customer will want to buy it.

In the early 2000s, technology has been a major factor in helping fashion manufacturers and retailers to successfully satisfy the needs and wants of the targeted customer, with body scanning being just one example. Body scanning software customizes patterns for an individual's body. This results in the kind of fit previously available only to couture customers. As technology continues to improve and become less costly, scanning of the entire body will become more common, resulting in the kind of fit previously available only in expensive made-to-measure fashion products.

The development of fashion marketing and merchandising as distinct professions with their own expertise, insights, and techniques, has made them the cornerstone of the modern world of fashion. The use of sophisticated marketing and merchandising methods and techniques has given rise to some of the most exciting and innovative strategies: among them are entertainment-oriented shopping malls, themed environments, designer and manufacturer retail flagship stores, brands, off-site retailing and e-tailing and packaging, now viewed as the science of temptation.

Fashion marketing and merchandising present a unique problem because of the ever-changing nature of fashion and the difficulty of predicting consumer demand. The fashion world is famous for its fast-moving, do-or-die success or failure rate. With a need to respond quickly to consumer purchasing, sophisticated processes are required for quick decision making that will support the fashion marketers and merchandisers in satisfying the customer.

See also [Fashion Industry](#); [Retailing](#).

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