

Inside womenswear

Three key industry players give their views on the issues that matter to you.

BRITAIN'S REALLY GOT TALENT

The retailer

PAMELA SHIFFER, owner, Pamela Shiffer, London

As the credits rolled on *Britain's Got Talent*, it made me think that, as a nation, we very often don't truly recognise just how much talent we harvest until it either moves abroad or is taken up by large foreign companies.

When you consider that in the western world we are leaders in many fields, including fashion, it's a wonder that so many of our top designers choose to show their collections everywhere but here. It's as though once the talent is recognised, certain designers abandon their roots, up sticks and move out. I mean, could you imagine Paris without Christian Dior, or Prada boycotting Milan? It would be inconceivable. I do appreciate that the kudos of working for some of the world's most prestigious fashion houses is an opportunity not to be missed – however, as we are a nation that produces some of the biggest and most relevant fashion talent, wouldn't it be great if we could hang onto them here.

What makes Britain great is our ability to nurture talent, bring it to the fore then expose it for all to appreciate. As the buying season comes around once more only the strong, forward-thinking businesses will prevail.

It's all about discovering new talent to keep our shops, customers and staff excited about the future, not the tried and tested formulas that are now starting to look a little jaded. Brands remember, us retailers are the final judges when it comes to placing orders, so let's see what you're made of.

Bring out the first contestant...

WILL YOU SINK OR SWIM?

The expert

THIERRY BALE, director, Management One

In today's economic climate it's all about embracing the "Re" Attitude: the need to re-think, re-do, re-train. And this can be summed up as follows: 1. Strategy. If you do not have a strategy, get one. If you had a strategy a year ago, re-visit it now as the old one is certainly no longer applicable. 2. Focus on what you can control. Don't waste time complaining about the economy, your competitors or the weather. Focus on things you can control: waste, planning, objective review of the business, sales staff, marketing, communication, expenses. 3. Take measurements to see whether there is a problem. Measure again to set up a standard and objectives for the business and finally measure again to see where you are. If you can't measure it, you can't fix it! 4. Manage your stock better as it is one of your greatest assets. Analyse your stock by product classification. See whether you can take a higher mark up, control your discounts. 5. As soon as your staff share your vision, train, train and train them again to ensure you can get the best out of them. Empower rather than delegate. Establish expectations. 6. Invest in marketing to ensure you do not disappear from the radar. Create activity in the shop and generate events. You must interact with customers (text, call, email, mail ...). Identify new marketing ideas and create a unique shopping experience. The above will succeed because you will be challenging yourself at all times. Dare to get out of your comfort zone! Don't forget: If you always do what you've always done, you'll always have what you've always had.



PAMELA SHIFFER



THIERRY BALE



BEATE KUBITZ

SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY

The brand

BEATE KUBITZ, co-founder, Makepiece

The recession mantra is that it will sort the wheat from the chaff. Good companies will thrive and those who fall short will fail. And we all hope that we're good enough. But at the same time, most retailers seem to be exhibiting the kind of caution that is at odds with providing women with the clothes they want. While paying lip service to emerging trends towards ethical and sustainable brands, buying patterns appear to be "stick to the known and hope for the best". Over and over I hear "we're just buying our existing brands", "we're cutting back on our orders this season", "we'll see where we are in the summer". The summer? When do you expect us to make stuff for delivery in September?!

But who can blame retailers for being cautious? I know that we're all walking a knife edge. So I've decided that if new retailers won't come to me, I'll go to them.

As we're in electioneering mode, this is the John Major Soapbox approach to marketing. Simple, direct and down to earth. Talking to women about clothes, what goes into them and how they think about them.

The idea is to introduce new trade customers to Makepiece. We approach new potential Makepiece stockists with an opportunity too good to miss and, in an era where added-value means everything, this proposition has been exceptionally well-received.

The evening is just me, a rail of Makepiece clothes and a glass of wine. I leave my sheep farm and studio in the Pennines and head (usually) south to talk about fashion, how to dress sustainably and how Makepiece clothing is made – from sheep to chic. There's a sneak preview of our next collection, and a chance to buy from this season or place an order for next season. We offer some PR support to promote the event, gaining local coverage and the retailer invites existing customers.

It's not complex, but in an over-produced, over-marketed world, it's a fresh approach and it really does help.

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