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This Is What Men Are Looking For In Fashion

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MINISTRY OF SUPPLY CO-FOUNDER GIHAN AMARASIRIWARDENA CLEANING THE 3D PRINT-KNIT MACHINE. THE PERFORMANCE CLOTHING RETAILER LETS CUSTOMERS CREATE THEIR OWN JACKETS IN THEIR NEWBURY STREET STORE IN BOSTON. **JORGE RIBAS/THE WASHINGTON POST VIA GETTY IMAGES**

Men are dressing up again, but now they want more than just style.

Knit tops and pants, and versatile, seasonless products have been hits in the men's category since last summer at [Abercrombie & Fitch](#), which has repositioned itself as the

brand for the older, 20-something millennial. And [premium denim brand Paige](#) earlier this month said it has stepped into men's footwear, with its first collection for Spring 2024. Last October saw [Perry Ellis International](#) sign a new licensing deal with Peerless clothing for suit separates, suits, tuxedos, sport coats and men's top coats for Spring 2024. The license is for the Perry Ellis brand and its younger-leaning Original Penguin line as the parent firm eyes the Gen Z and millennial customer base.

It appears that the focus on tailored clothing isn't going away anytime soon. That was the conclusion of a panel of men's wear experts hosted by the Retail Marketing Society.

"People are coming to us to buy confidence in a nutshell," Sid Mashburn said. He is the founder of his eponymous specialty stores, which originally began as a men's tailored specialty store—it now offers a women's line—in Atlanta but has since expanded to include shops in Houston, Dallas, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles and N.Y.C.

Mashburn also said that his tie business is up more than 50 percent this year, on top of a "big number" from the prior year. "Guys are wanting to dress. They're not just wanting to dress up just for the office. They kind of want to dress up to go out to dinner," he said.

Mashburn said each store has a master tailor that works with customers to create custom products. While each store is very localized for its specific community needs, the retailer does have a national following due to its e-commerce business. The demographic range of customers is broad, from kids in high school to 85-year-olds, he said, with the sweet spot between ages early 30's to early 50's.

"We're really looking at how do we build the ABCs that are the basics of a man's wardrobe. And so that is the way we sort of lay that out—we take a triangle or pyramid and cut it into two bifurcated [components]. One side is good, better best and the other side is Core Plus in fashion," he said. While store associates talk with customers to find out what's the guys looking for, it is tailored clothing that is Mashburn's biggest classification and the retailer does a good business in ready-to-wear and in its made-to-measure custom offerings.

"Dressing up is coming back. Guys want just the right amount of style, but they don't want to sacrifice comfort and convenience," Gihan Amarasiriwardena, co-founder and president of [Ministry of Supply](#), said.

Ministry of Supply started its business selling a dress shirt on Kickstarter that allowed for temperature changes. He said the model allowed the company to launch new products

through “small-batch production” and then level up.

He said his brand’s customers are looking for fit silhouettes that exists in their wardrobe for five years at a time. While the pandemic had them wearing athleisure clothes that had stretch waist bands and joggers, now they’re “going back into the work environment and they want to bring that comfort with them.”

Amarasiriwardena said the brand’s premise is on the idea of taking performance materials and applying them to core basics that people wear everyday for work. While performance materials have been in use by Nike and Under Armour, he said those were mostly for the gym and weekend wear, but not for going to the office.

He said another change was men are now ditching their dry cleaning routine, preferring to machine wash at home. That has had an impact on business travel and travel in general. Everything in the [Ministry of Supply line](#) is machine washable.

“For a business traveler, for example, that’s really important because sometimes they don’t have time for overnight dry cleaning. They want to sink wash, for example, and go right to their next meeting,” Amarasiriwardena said. He added that that’s the combination of convenience and comfort that represents a key value proposition of the brand.

Customer acquisition is 60 percent Facebook and the balance a mix of Google, LinkedIn and print media. Amarasiriwardena said that while the average value spent by a customer might be \$220, one that’s acquired through LinkedIn could be “north of \$600” since he’s buying an entire suit plus a dress shirt or two. He said acquiring business founders, owners and similar professionals via LinkedIn has been profitable even if it doesn’t have the same scale of Facebook. In addition to 3 times the average spend, these are customers who return and buy again, he said.

Ministry of Supply does rely on some influencers, but not necessarily the typical Instagram or even TikTok user. One example is the brand’s tracking of wearing behaviors. “We find that there’s these influencers who are very specific on packing light for one week, one backpack. They’re pack hackers, and their content works very well for us. Because that helps show kind of the use cases,” he said, adding that the company finds other influencers for products that are a bit more utilitarian and it’s a model that is working for the brand.

Joseph DeAcetis, men’s wear journalist and creative style director of Stylujo.com, as well as former fashion stylist at Forbes, said he believes much of the streaming fashion shows

feature looks to create “oohs and ahhs” aimed at delivering “shock value,” but is not reflective of necessarily what men are seeking in fashion. He said that while there are the social media influencers, perhaps the real fashion influencers in men’s are the athletes, citing to Michael Jordan as “probably one of the biggest influencers in fashion [in] sneakers.”

DeAcetis also believes dressing well is back, and said there’s data to prove that dressing well at the office helps with the perception that one has both the skills and style to be viewed as a leader.

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