Bespoke service to fit the bill

Here’s how Raymond and Aditya Birla Group are luring customers who prefer customised tailoring

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The retail and apparel industry in India appears to be coming full circle. A few years ago, the industry witnessed a market shift to ready-to-wear clothing, with manufacturers offering buyers more design and attractive price points. However, with quality clothing in the limelight, the industry once again saw rising consumer interest from discerning fashion-conscious buyers for made-to-order and customised tailoring services. Organised retailers such as Raymond and Aditya Birla Group have been quick to tap the growing demand for customised tailoring services. They saw it as an opportunity for value addition and building loyalty among existing as well as potential new customers.

Encouraging people to opt for bespoke service is also change of habit. And for changing consumer habits, you need to offer him more comfort and value than say a neighbourhood tailor,” says Vishak Kumar, chief executive officer, Madora Fashion and Lifestyle (a part of Aditya Birla Fashion and Retail Ltd).

Madora Fashion and Lifestyle brand Van Heusen offers bespoke services MYFIT. Tailoring continues to be a fragmented market. With the emergence of online marketplaces and technology innovation, fashion has become affordable and mass.

“This is an apt opportunity for organised retail players like Raymond and Aditya Birla Group to tap into the growing desire for personalisation in fashion. With bespoke service, the players are well-placed to attract more value from fashion-conscious buyers who are ready to pay a premium for customised products,” says Vishal Talwar, campus director of Management, IIM, Manali University.

To be able to stand apart and compete with scores of specialised neighbourhood tailors and other fashion establishments offering bespoke services, organised retailers need to go beyond aspects of the service component right, says Talwar. These include getting the product (garment) right, ensuring consistent quality, and on-time delivery.

Most importantly, since tailoring is not considered fashionable back home in many Western countries, players offering bespoke service have to build innovation with designs to justify the premium that they charge from customers.

Ramshash Sharma, head of design, Raymond Madras Momen (RMM), says, “People tend to compare an MTM product with a locally-tailored product. Therefore it is necessary to differentiate between mass tailoring services, which is available all across, and the custom-made offering in the luxury space.”

The ability of organised bespoke service providers to score over other unorganised counterparts stems from the strength in offering a wider fabric and style choice.

A higher level of customisation, quality consistency with standardised manufacturing practices, and capacity for fast turnarounds and delivery.

Raymond MTM and Van Heusen MYFIT have made huge investments in mid-to-end integrated technology for quick turnaround and delivery. Both are leveraging data analytics to arrive at the best fit.

Raymond MTM uses data analytics to work on different body shapes and comes up with various patterns.

Van Heusen has built a simple digital interface. Customers can access digital display screens at its stores to explore different fabrics, fits, and styles.

Van Heusen’s MYFIT has re-engineered its manufacturing facility to produce garments in three days with very low inventory levels. On-time delivery is another buzz being bespoke service. MYFIT relies on in-house resources coupled with third party logistics partner for timely delivery. MYFIT service is available across 200-plus Van Heusen stores spanning 100 plus towns.

With a high level of customisation and craftsmanship involved, bespoke service come at a premium. A fine MTM suit price can start from Rs 5,000 and can go up to as high as Rs 35,000. Clearly, in this segment, cost is not an advantage. With individual pieces being custom-made, cost for customers goes up as the service comes at a premium, says Talwar.

Even as demand grows, the challenge for organised retail players is to achieve standardisation in tailoring services. Tailoring cannot be easily standardised as it depends on individual skills and expertise. Thus, standardising tailoring skills and expertise across retail cities will be a bit of a challenge for players, suggests Talwar.

A bigger question perhaps is the limited ability of bespoke service providers to scale up. It is critical for players to determine how much they wish to target as scalability would have a direct impact on accessibility and quality of service. For Talwar, the question is how easily should their service be made available? “We have precedents of fashion suffering as it goes mass. If everybody has access to it, why would customers pay a premium for it?”

Kumar has an answer. “Not every business needs to build escalate. We mean serving about 10,000 customers. We do not want to be aggressive in pushing our service. Rather the focus is on engaging customers, adding value to their buying experience and earning their loyalty,” he says.