

London Trend Report – April 2008

Superior Shopping Services

If you are looking for a new outfit the average high street is a daunting prospect for even the most experienced of power shoppers. Too many shops, too much choice, countless rails and tiny fitting rooms and aggressive sales assistants. The busy working executive women of London mostly have little time or lust to trudge through these shops for their new outfits and accessories. While the solution for many has been to take advantage of a growing number of “personal shoppers” in the large stores, there is a growing range of retail services appearing that go one satisfaction-stage further.

Home sales, out-of-hours, and desk side sales are the big new trends in London’s exclusive shopping circles. Though these are aimed at the up market customers, the USP, lessons and drive behind these ideas are something that lower scale retailers can learn from and offer in a varied form. The so-called home sales take place at a private location and are organised typically by a yummy mummy trying get back into work by selling selective favourite brands, or who has started designing clothes to suit her new lifestyle. Invitations to her “guests” are by word of mouth and the whole shopping experience is primarily relaxed – the focus on hassle-free browsing and buying. One home-sales organiser says it’s “like a club. I share similar lifestyles, tastes and needs to my guests...I know what type of clothes they need to pick up their children from school, or to go straight from the office to dinner.” This club-like atmosphere also makes it into a good networking opportunity, with many guests using the sale to swap business cards and tips.

Another important factor is that of exclusivity – in the world of the ever- ubiquitous luxury labels, originality is at a premium, with some home-sellers sourcing one-off finds in as far away as Los Angeles. As one organiser says, “many of my pieces are blow the radar”. Cosiness seems also to be a selling point – with the guests offered tea and home-made brownies, amidst a seductive setting of scented candles and soft furnishings.

Many shops are also trying to develop their own superior services, with so-called out-of-hours shopping. Typically this will be in the morning accompanied by a power breakfast of mini organic muffins and fruit smoothies, manicures, and can start as early as 8am. These

invitation-only events by for example handbag designer Anya Hindmarch are increasingly sought after. "As a working mother of three children I am grateful for opportunities to shop when I don't have the fit into the normal retail hours" says one London yummy mummy. "At the Hindmarch event where next season's handbags are presented, "you get to see and touch the bags which is so much better than buying over the internet, and you catch up with your peer group too."

Hindmarch herself says of the trend for out-of-hours shopping " is all about service".

Marc Cohen an analyst at Ledbury Research says, "We're seeing an increasing amount of brands offering products to customers in more proactive ways...There's greater competition in the fashion and luxury sector now, so brands are having to go the extra mile to stand out from the crowd."

Another growing retail service is "desk side" shopping. This bringing and selling of clothes and shoes into the office environment used to be aimed at the bored secretaries, but is now moving into the higher earning bracket, with for example the Jimmy Choo shoe service delivering to your desk. Fashion boutique Matches is launching The Matches Club offering an in-store experience out-of-store (at your office or home). "People are becoming increasingly time-poor" says Matches owner Tom Chapman, "that is why there have to be more communication with clients." Meanwhile over at Browns, managing director Niki Scordi says "I wouldn't say it is the end of retail as we know it, but we have to be really flexible and accommodate customers who don't have time."

Advantages at a glance:

- Pre-selection; time saving for the style conscious
- Exclusivity: unique, unusual, and exclusive brands
- Networking: meet other people in informal atmosphere
- Hassle-free shopping: dressing up rather than trying on
- Privacy: trying on clothes in a home atmosphere

Links

www.matchesfashion.com

www.brownsfashion.com

www.anyahindmarch.com