



GUYYS

and their eyes



The Young Men's Market Revisited

BY DEIRDRE CARROLL / SENIOR EDITOR

Men's style has come a long way since the rise of the metrosexual several years back. Metrosexuality kicked off a masculine revolution that has become a part of evolving popular culture, but its inherent sense of vanity has since given way to a much simpler appreciation for masculine style.

VM is revisiting the contemporary young men's market and has spoken to experts on the segment, as well as eyewear suppliers, to explore this new generation of young men and what they are looking for in their eyewear.

What we learned is that men, especially young men, have become much more in tune with, and interested in, current fashion trends, often as a response to their increasing adoption of digital media, and that brand names are important to them, generally more so than women. Additionally, we found that almost universally each eyewear supplier pointed to an increase in percentage of men's collections and/or male specific styles in their overall brand portfolios over the last five to 10 years.

Elise Diamantini, managing and market editor of *MR Magazine*, the leading trade magazine for the menswear industry, confirmed that "men's fashion is having a moment mainly due to the younger customer's newfound interest in clothes and style."

According to Diamantini, the new male consumer is younger; in his late teens, 20s and early 30s. It's the "teenage guy eating ramen noodles in order to save money to buy the latest limited edition col-

laboration" who is "always plugged in and up on the latest projects and styles" and the "20 and 30 something year-old guy [who] might have a little more disposable income" and is "dressing up because his 'Casual Friday' father never did."

Pam Goodfellow, consumer insights director for BIGinsight, a consumer intelligence firm that provides analysis of behavior in the areas of products and services, retail, financial services, automotive and media, has the stats on the 18-34 year-old age bracket to back up Diamantini's assertions.

"While the majority of young men look for value/comfort or a more traditional look when shopping for clothing, a healthy third, 32.0 percent, say the newest trends and styles are important to them," said Goodfellow. "This number is only slightly lower than young women at 34.6 percent and much higher than adults in general (18+) at 18.0 percent."

Goodfellow also said that "young men are also more brand-oriented than their female counterparts. Three out of five (59.5 percent) young men say familiar fashion labels are important to them, compared to about half (51.2 percent) of females" in the same age bracket (18-34).

As of BIGinsight's October 2012 monthly survey, it also seems young men's income is more likely to support their appreciation of brands. The survey found that the average yearly income of young men (18-34) is about \$48,700, higher than that of women in the same age group at \$46,600.

But despite their increased interest in shopping, their shopping habits haven't really changed. "Men want to be in and out of a store as quickly as possi-

ble," said Diamantini. "If they're into clothes, they've researched the product they're looking for online and know what they want, how much it costs, etc., before they even walk into a store."

In fact, both experts point to the increased adoption of digital formats in helping to fuel this shift in men's perception and appreciation of personal style.

"The internet and social media are two main reasons," stated *MR's* Diamantini. "Most men are comfortable shopping online and from their mobile devices. They're able to buy what they want from the privacy of their own home or office. And the proliferation of men's style blogs and street style blogs have definitely peaked guys' interest in clothes and learning how to dress."

"I think the rise of e-commerce and social media have made the young male shopper more accessible and perhaps have made him a more willing consumer," agreed Goodfellow. "There's an ease in shopping online and with social media. They can connect with retailers, and even their own friends, to get in touch with what's new, exciting and trendy.

"For instance, if [a man] admires one friend's style, he can do a quick check to see which retailers that friend may be following. It's a more covert way of keeping up with new styles, easier than asking male friends where they got their jeans, something that women are more prone to do."

Diamantini added that "social media continues to be an effective way of reaching the male consumer. Collaborations between brands and retailers have also been successful. They create buzz around the store

Continued on page 36



A New Generation of Young Men's Eyewear Needs

Continued from page 35

and/or brand and create a sense of urgency to buy before it's gone, especially collaborations that are promoted online through social media and blogs."

BIGinsight has found that compared to the general population, young men's apparel purchases are more likely to be swayed by newer forms of media, including social media (17.5 percent), blogs (11.7 percent), satellite radio (12.0 percent) and video on mobile devices (14.5 percent.)

According to VisionWatch, the large scale continuous study conducted by The Vision Council, for the 12 months ending September 2012, nearly two thirds of men ages 18-34 (61.2 percent) admitted to needing some form of vision correction.

guys to wear glasses. We see new styles as an opportunity for men to look up-to-date and on trend."

Dick Russo, executive vice president of Safilo USA, added, "The young consumer no longer looks at eyewear as a utility item but instead, sees eyewear as an expression of themselves and how they want the world to see them. They are looking for something that distinguishes them from the masses and offers something that is distinctive and has its own point of view."

"Traditionally, the category has been dominated by women but now the fashion industry is seeing a surge in male eyewear," stated Milena Cavicchioli, vice president of marketing for Luxottica USA, who also oversees the company's product

"Men's styles have increased significantly in the last five to 10 years due to the popularity of retro styles," confirmed Joe Tallier, vice president of global sales for Ogi Eyewear. "Eyeglasses used to be more unisex. Today, women's frames look more feminine, and men's frames more masculine and there is more of a distinct separation in sales approaches. Young men are responding to our collections specifically targeted toward them, such as the Japanese Vintage Collection and The Executive Collection from Seraphin."

"We recognize the growing need for men's eyewear collections to be both functional and fashionable," explained Laura Khligh, a designer for the McGee Group. "The Orvis eyewear collection offers traditional styling inspired by an outdoor lifestyle. Argyleculture Eyewear by Russell Simmons targets a younger customer, fusing classic Ivy League with modern fashion trends for the urban graduate."

At ClearVision Optical, brand manager Pam Elfrich said that their "men's business has been increasing as men are becoming more fashion conscious and that according to [company] research, the average male consumer owns two pairs of eyeglasses, while the average female consumer owns only one pair," while REM Eyewear's portfolio actually "skew[s] toward men due to John Varvatos and Tumi," according to creative director, Nicolas Roseillier.

At Europa International, the percentage of their men's offerings has increased from approximately 30 percent to 40 percent over the last 10 years. "The increase in fashion that men now look for has increased the need to devote more space to men's eyewear," added Jerry Wolowicz, president of Europa.

And Kenmark has seen "growth of 5 percent in the men's category in relation to the women's category in our brand portfolio over the last 10 years," according to Duralde.

While at Charmant USA, director of marketing and product, Dee Berghuys, estimates their cur-

Continued on page 38



"In the past five to 10 years, men have become more like women in how they shop. They have begun to shop for themselves and take interest in the way they look and dress."— *Luxottica's Milena Cavicchioli*

The combination of all this information makes a compelling argument for understanding how to appeal to this increasingly important demographic in terms of style offerings and merchandising communications and several eyewear suppliers have invested in doing just that.

Supply and Demand

"Men follow trends more than ever and this year more dollars were spent on grooming and styling by college age men than women. Therefore, men's eyewear has become a part of the faster fashion story of retail, appealing to a more engaged audience," said David Duralde, chief creative officer at Kenmark Optical. "There is more individuality in eyewear than ever before, since it is now cool for

department. "In the past five to 10 years, men have become more like women in how they shop. They have begun to shop for themselves and take interest in the way they look and dress.

"As with the men's market, I think the younger consumer is looking for something that is going to make them stand out. Whatever the age, men nowadays care more about their appearance including what they put on their face. As the men's market has expanded over the years, we have grown as well," she explained.

Size Matters

Like Luxottica, many of these suppliers have increased the size of their eyewear offerings to the male consumer.

New Trends and Styles Stand Out for Young Men

Continued from page 36

rent brand portfolio at 50/50 men versus women, which is up a full 10 percent for men in the last 10 years. “The fact that we are offering more collections for this target customer shows that it is an important market segment,” she said.

Brands and Trends

“Men are more aware of designer brands, especially in the eyewear arena,” declared Khligh of McGee. “With celebrities and athletes wearing eyewear, designer-branded eyewear is very trendy. Men are looking for the retro and celebrity influence in eyewear. They are also aware of what looks good on them.”

“Guys look for brands that relate to them. The guy who is 18-25 is just starting to present himself to the world, and we are just getting a glimpse of who he is, which means his fashion is unique and his own signature,” said Kenmark’s Duralde. “Deeper shapes, thinner acetate profiles and color are distinguishing characteristics of a young guy’s look.”

“Designer eyewear signifies value, style and quality and men feel more confident selecting eyewear from a brand that they are familiar with and trust,” said Cavicchioli of Luxottica. “Young men are stepping out in terms of color, patterns and shapes. They are ready to explore and are no longer just about the classic black and tortoise shell frames. We have also seen that they are becoming more conscious of materials, which has been another major focus for us in developing the eyewear collections.”

“Our young male consumer is looking for eyewear from those brands that match his clothing style,” according to Elfrich at ClearVision. “Our collections for the male consumer have become focused on more colorful designs with emphasis on fashion forward eye shapes and patterns, interesting and trendy materials and embellishments. We used to limit our palette but now incorporate blues, greens and merlot into our men’s lines, as well as subtly mixed hues that

are a bit more complex. Our Izod, Marc Ecko Cut & Sew and Op collections closely follow color palettes and design inspiration from the apparel offered by those brands. Many male consumers today want acetate frames, while just five years ago the industry was dominated by metal and semi-rimless metal frames.”

“We’ve seen a lot of young men gravitating toward heavier acetates and some classic shapes,” confirmed Scott Shapiro, chief operations officer of

internet which has a very real influence on their psyche, their fashion sensibility and their need to express themselves,” explained Safilo’s Russo. “No longer isolated by geography, they have a window on the entire world and react accordingly.”

“Social media has immensely changed marketing to the young men’s market in the last five to 10 years. With more than two million Twitter followers, Russell Simmons reaches a large number of



“Eyeglasses used to be more unisex. Today, women’s frames look more feminine, and men’s frames more masculine and there is more of a distinct separation in sales approaches.”—*OGI’s Joe Tallier*

Europa. “More generally though, we find that young men are more willing to be more fashionable with their eyewear, instead of trying to hide it. American men’s styles are bolder and more diverse than they’ve been in my lifetime. More men are looking for frames that make a statement or at least fit their personalities, where in the past they were often looking for something nobody would notice.”

“The styling for men within Scott Harris and the new Scott Harris Underground has definitely gotten more fashion forward than it was five to 10 years ago,” added Europa’s Wolowicz. “Exciting acetate materials along with distinctive embellishments have replaced the basic gold, brown and gunmetal non-descript men’s styles.”

‘Social’ Cues

Many pointed to the rise of social media as a major factor in young men’s renewed appreciation for fashion and style.

“I think the young male consumer is more connected today than at any time in the past via the

young people. Therefore, the re-launch of Argyle-culture was heavily promoted through social media and involved a full re-launch of the brand’s website and social media pages,” said McGee’s Khligh. “The more ‘social-friendly’ a men’s brand is, the more interest they will generate with the young men’s market.”

Roseillier added, “With the rise of social media, we see the customer guiding the marketing and merchandising. Converse is a great example of this. The consumers interact regularly with the brand, offering online content and photos, in some cases even designing their own materials. In true underground and rebellious style, the consumers have made Converse their own.”

“Social media brings a consumer voice to the brand itself and the merchandising materials must be reflective of the inclusive brand story,” said Duralde. “Jhane Barnes is a more individualistic boutique sensibility, while Original Penguin is a trend forward, retro-inspired collection. Timex is an every man’s story, emphasizing quality and durabil-



ity, while TMX is a more youthful, sport focused aesthetic. Young guys don't like hyper-commercial messages and the more subdued and authentic the brand and product story is, the better the relationship with the consumer."

Talk the Talk

"Social media has impacted their fashion sense and men are moving quicker to be on trend than ever before," agreed Charmant's Berghuys, however, she cautions "the designs have [to] remain true to the brands roots and philosophy. Brands such as Puma and Trussardi are recognizable names to this target market so they are already aware of the brands positioning and status."

"We always begin with the brand story," said Roseillier. "For Varvatos it's all about rock 'n' roll style paired with an artisan design sense. Converse is

unconventionally cool and completely unique. These stories guide our accounts in targeting each brand's demographic and understanding the consumers."

According to Luxottica's Cavicchioli, "It is crucial that the brands' message and values are reflected in not only the product, but the merchandising and marketing as well. If a campaign doesn't seem authentic or true to the brand, consumers are unable to connect with the product and are turned off. A great deal of time and money goes into research to make sure our marketing and merchandising align with the brands identity. Dedicated trade marketing materials are created each season that specifically relate to the brands, campaigns and collections to help define the benefits and features behind the product."

ClearVision's Elfrich added, "We now speak to our accounts about how our optical brands tie back to the aesthetics of the brand. Each brand of eye-

wear we carry targets the specific demographics of that licensed brand. Eyewear, clothing and accessories now have a more cohesive look and tie closely to the brands' DNA. The young men's market is responding to branded advertising and the image of the brands they love to wear. They look to the brands that define their clothing style to do the same for their eyewear."

Kenmark's Duralde concluded, "We spend more time talking about the end consumer and creating point of purchase material that directly relates to the end consumer. The brand presentation to the buyer reflects our total commitment to the lifestyle of the brand consumer. It's a more 360 approach, with emphasis on not only B2B business, but incorporating a B2C selling strategy in the mix. We always emphasize the end consumer as being an important selling factor to the buyer." ■

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Retailers Who Know What Men Want

BY CATHERINE WOLINSKI / ASSISTANT EDITOR

As the young man's attitude about eyewear has changed, so, too, have the merchandising and sales efforts among optical shops throughout the U.S. Indie boutiques, midsize chains and regional players alike have had to adapt to this market shift in order to facilitate its continuing growth and prominence, and they have told *VM* that today's men are more interested in eyewear now than ever before. Businesses large and small are adapting to a new breed of male consumer who is not only concerned with the look and make of his frames, but is buying more frequently and willingly.



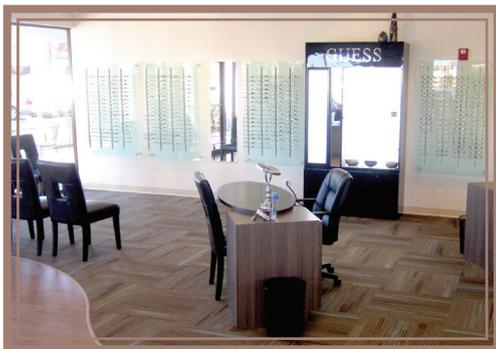
“Men are not as concerned about price as they are about style.”

A Midwest Kingdom

Crown Vision Center

22 Locations (Illinois, Missouri)

Jen Oliver, Buyer



Crown Vision Center in City Place, Mo. has a sleek, masculine interior.

Jen Oliver, a buyer at Crown Vision Center in City Place, Mo. is able to balance a specific focus with a broad spectrum of customers when buying for her store. “Men used to come in wanting the exact same frame, color and brand that they purchased five plus years ago,” Oliver said. “[Now] we have more brands and a much wider selection of men's frames in order to cater to every age group.”

At Crown Vision Center, Oliver said, the purchasing characteristics of young male customers vary, but the end result is often the same. “Most young men know what they want before they walk in the door,” she said. “They tend to look for plastic, geek chic and wayfarer styles that are a bolder or heavier color.”

When selecting new eyewear, their main concern is the look or trendiness of the frame, with budget falling into the background. “Men are not as concerned about price as they are about style,” she said. “The budget tends to be an afterthought. Once they find the perfect style, color and fit, the price does not matter.”

In the past few years, Oliver has observed that men have become more aware of their eyewear choices and their overall image, and summarized the shift simply: “Men are more fashion conscious. They are concerned about the latest fashions and what looks good on them.”



“Most guys know exactly what they want or know that they need assistance in their selection.”

Fashion and Function

Eye Care Associates

24 Locations (North Carolina)

Cindy Keil, Buyer

When catering to the young male market, Eye Care Associates buyer Cindy Keil focuses on versatility. Having several locations in Raleigh, N.C., targeting this audience is particularly worthwhile.

“Being in Raleigh, we have many colleges that are in close proximity to all of our offices,” Keil said. “Most of our young men want styles that are trendy; something they can wear out on the weekends with the guys, but can also cross over to be a stylish, professional look.”



Eye Care Associates is ready for the guys in any season.

Keil described the buying habits of young guys as straightforward and premeditated, but said they are also willing to be swayed toward something new. “They know what they are looking for before they even walk into our office,” she said. “They have a pretty good idea of what look, style or even what frame color they want to purchase. However, they are also very open to suggestions from our consultants. The guys want to get it exactly right.”

To attract young men's business, Eye Care Associates plants visual cues in and outside of their stores. “We typically make sure to have POP from brands in our stores in prominent places—for example, perforated vinyl images in store windows where this demographic is most prevalent.”

The retailer is hosting an event throughout the month of November in which frame shows from different brands will be featuring men's eyewear lines. “We are noticing that more design houses are paying attention to the wants and needs of male consumers,” she said, comparing today's market with that of a

Continued on page 42



Perspectives on the Young Men's Market

Continued from page 40

decade ago. “Ten years ago, men weren’t as concerned about fashion, they cared more about function. Now, they are demanding it all.”



“A handsome young man wants to wear a shape that is going to make him look handsome.”

A New York Frame of Mind

Metro Optics

Bronx, N.Y.

Aurora Susi, Manager



With three locations in the Bronx, New York City, Metro Optics makes sure to appeal to the fashionable urban crowd.

Aurora Susi, manager of Metro Optics in the Bronx, N.Y., is adamant about the fact that the male customer has evolved in recent years. “They care more than ever. It’s more than just seeing through the glasses now; it’s definitely a fashion accessory.”

According to Susi, young men who were once attracted to the sleek look of rectangular, metal frames have been replaced by a contemporary crowd

which favors thick plastic frames. “Years ago, a small rectangular frame with a good designer was always an acceptable, safe frame,” Susi explained. “Now, even if each one has a different style, they all agree on one thing—the new brown or black plastic geek chic frames. That’s what everybody wants now.”

As Metro Optics’ primary buyer, Susi has recognized that although the current style has been appropriated by a multitude of designers, she feels one company is responsible for popularizing the look. “It all started with Ray Ban. The Ray Ban Wayfarer set the standard, then all the other designers copied it and made it their own look.”

Whether Ray Ban, Cartier, Sean Jean or Michael Kors, all sellers at Metro Optics, Susi has noted her own trend—each young man that comes into the shop is looking for design and style. “A young man always wants a designer frame. It kind of implies that they have status,” she said. “For the 20 to 40 year-old man that dresses well, it’s important to them that they have a nice frame. It used to be jewelry that would identify a status—not anymore. Instead, a frame will show status.”

By knowing her market, Susi has been able to adapt to the change and keep one step ahead of what her customers will want. “I’ve had to be more creative. My buying has to be more careful. Where I would try out new things before, I tend to buy safe now. I go with what I know will sell.”



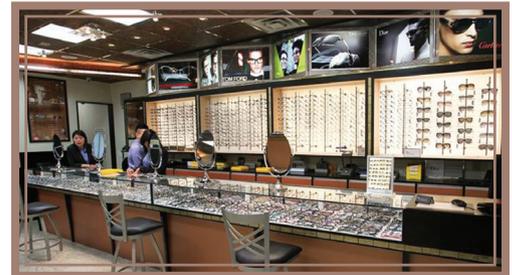
“[Men] like their frames to last both in durability and fashion.”

A Hand in Brand

Mott Optical Group

Manhattan and Queens, N.Y.

Kenneth Ma, Manager



Mott Street Optical in Lower Manhattan features brands with notable men's collections.

New York City’s Mott Optical Group spans five locations throughout Manhattan and Queens, but a common thread exists throughout: When selecting pieces, brand and marketing is always a concern.

“We coordinate closely with brands to select the right medium for our target customer to get their information,” said Kenneth Ma, business development manager of Mott Street Optical in Lower Manhattan. “For example, Tag Hauer and Mott Optical Group just worked on an advertising campaign. With Ray Ban and Dior Homme, we have chosen specific point of purchase posters and materials that feature the contemporary male in stylish or fun environments.”

Keeping the young men’s market in mind, Mott Optical focuses on designs that are classic but current. “The brands that appeal to the young men in their 20s are, some can say, the hipster brands. Bold, acetate frames from companies like A|X and Ray Ban do very well. As men approach their 30s, they still have that 20s sensibility of being fashionable, but have more disposable income and are more quality conscious than price conscious. We look out for simple, sleek and classic, but not something that their fathers will wear,” Ma said.

What Ma sees as the biggest change in men’s eyewear over the past decade is the initiative of brands themselves to create pieces or collections that are more male-directed. “Brands specifically target the

Continued on page 44



Merchandising and Sales Efforts Keep Pace With Young Men's Market

Continued from page 42

male demographic, or open specific lines dedicated to males. Tag Heuer and Mont Blanc are masculine brands that don't have female frames. Also, Dior, a predominately feminine brand, has extended and designed their Homme brand very well."

As far as what guys are looking for, Ma said that "they are mainly concerned about the style and design," and that the contemporary crowd tends to be "impressed with certain technological or aesthetic designs."



"Young men are looking for trendy and classy."

Tradition Meets Technology

Standard Optical

18 Locations (Utah)

Aaron Schubach, Vice President/COO



Standard Optical uses strategic POP displays throughout its locations in Utah.

Standard Optical vice president and COO Aaron Schubach makes it clear that an in-depth understanding of the modern man is necessary to a store's success. While many shops limit their outreach to POP and window displays, the route Standard Optical takes to attract the contemporary male con-

sumer is precise, swift and effective. "[I] tailor my offers to them in a manner that they typically like to be communicated with—e-mail and text messaging. Digital, HTML and e-mail advertising is an inexpensive way to talk to this valuable consumer in the manner that they appreciate."

By making keen observations and using them to his advantage, Schubach has recognized an important facet to reaching certain consumer groups: a niche market must have an environment to thrive in. "We are very mindful of the men's market. This consumer has an unprecedented style sense and often is willing to spend more money than a female consumer on quality and fashionable products. Style, trends and above all functionality are much more important to a male consumer than budget."

Schubach believes that the transformation of the men's eyewear market in recent years necessitates that retailers make a shift as well. "In the past, retailers focused more on function and durability than fashion. Ignoring the fashion component in the men's eyewear market is a grave mistake, and while the attention to detail, function and durability is still a factor, men desire fashionable eyewear."



"Trends tend to be the most important; they want the right look."

All About Selection

Wisconsin Vision

27 Locations (Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin)

Darren Horndasch, President/CEO

Choosing the right styles and brands is in the sights of all dispensaries, but when it comes to the men's market, Wisconsin Vision is particularly focused.



The atmosphere in Wisconsin Vision is fun but not overly feminine.

The retailer recently added to its variety of men's collections throughout 10 Midwestern locations.

"This has been a specific focus for the past 12 months," said Darren Horndasch, company president. "We have been adding to our collection of frames [with] Danny Gokey Eyewear, Ray Ban, Oakley, Kenneth Cole Reaction and Black Eye by Silver Dollar [which have] sold very well."

Horndasch believes that designers and suppliers themselves have been more aware of this demographic, too. "Traditionally, fashion and branding have been geared by the manufacturers toward women—a trend we see changing as glasses become more chic. Over the past 10 years, the availability of frame selection that appeals to this market has vastly improved."

Though a mixture of frames yields a mixture of price points, Horndasch separates his pricing into two categories: brand and style. "There are those looking for a specific brand name and those that want a style or trend." Frames range between \$100 and \$250, but "much like the balance of the market, the sweet spot is \$149 to \$189." For the young guys, though, price isn't an issue. "As glasses have become more popular and acceptable, more young males are purchasing glasses, where in the past they were a bit more conservative." ■

