

## Experts Reveal What it Takes to Target the Modern Men's Consumer

Tara Donaldson for Sourcing Journal  
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It's safe to say that most retailers still don't get today's consumer, despite the fact that talk about the changed shopper keeps pointing to three key demands: differentiation, personalization and immediacy.

At a Project talk dubbed "Breakfast with the Disruptors" and hosted by Pivot, Fung Global Retail & Technology and First Insight in Las Vegas on Monday, five experts dissected what the modern man wants from his apparel and how retailers will need to get it to him.

Men today are generally more likely to dress themselves, more interested in what they wear and not at all eager to look like Average Joe.

Put plainly, "People are looking for differentiated products," said Nelson Mui, men's fashion director at Hudson's Bay.

And in response, Hudson's Bay (which operates its namesake store, Lord & Taylor, Saks Fifth Avenue and seven others), has been adding stations in its stores where shoppers can personalize things like bags with patches and embellishments. The retailer is also creating in-store spaces that are less brand designated than they have been in the past.

"The millennial consumer is not as brand loyal as before," Mui said. "It's about curating spaces that may be a little bit more flex and less committed to a specific brand."

Differentiated products and personalization is also about individualization, said GQ's digital style director, Matthew Sebra.

"Guys want those special pieces they can't get everywhere else," he noted.

Basics have become too banal for consumers to care to spend much money on or much time thinking about—what they want are statement pieces. "I think the information is coming so fast and so hard now," Sebra said, "Jaden Smith wears something and within 24 hours we've saturated our coverage on that. So the question becomes, how do you synthesize that?"

With consumers ever changing and retailers ever at a loss for how to cater to them, retail has reached a

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tipping point. Now, retailers have little choice left than to figure out the dynamic nature of the group they want to sell to.

**“The consumers right now are not brand loyal,” echoed Greg Petro, CEO and founder of retail technology solutions provider First Insight. “They are not looking for you to dictate something to them, and they are looking to get something very quickly.”**

That need for immediacy has been fueled by both technology and the increasing availability of fast fashion. But if brands don't truly grasp their buyers, not even fast fashion will be able to help them keep up with their consumer.

**Brands, as Petro said, are at risk for being “on the back end of that tipping point looking at old stuff” while consumer behavior changes at warp speed.**

Mui added, “We are all basically trying to shift to what the consumer is telling us because they are now the fashion director.”

Shifts in the greater market have also contributed to the altered consumer.

For one, millennials are the largest workforce in the country currently, and coupled with Gen Z, half of the U.S. population is now under 35, Nick Graham, CEO of the modern menswear line of the same name, said.

What's more, as Mui added, 99 percent of the

companies in this country have a workforce of 500 or fewer.

“You've got this incredibly entrepreneurial society happening where they don't want to look like IBM,” he said.

But catering to today's consumer comes down to one thing, really.

“The new way to understand the consumer is not at a category level, it's at a segment level,” Petro said.

Brands need to start looking at psychographics over demographics alone, and here's why.

An athletic wear brand, say, could have two customers with identical demographics, but one is

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what they'd call an authentic yoga practitioner, who buys the product for a physical activity they take seriously as part of their lifestyle, and the non-authentic yoga practitioner, who maybe takes the activity somewhat less seriously.

**“One will pay more for wicking technology and one will pay more for the fashion element,” Petro said. “The concept of psychographics is extremely important.”**

Brands will have to focus on how people think and feel, age and income aside, Graham said. “It's the sort of squishy stuff above the price point, ‘how does this brand make you feel?’”

And to engender feelings that compel consumers to buy, product on offer will

simply have to possess elements that are uncommon.

**“Seventy percent of what's at Macy's is on sale at Amazon,” Petro said. “If you don't have differentiated product, there's not going to be a reason to shop.”**