

A photograph of a clothing store interior. A long metal rack is filled with various garments, including shirts, blouses, and dresses in shades of blue, white, and pink. To the right, a mannequin is dressed in a light blue top and a dark skirt. The floor is made of wood with a herringbone pattern. The text "ROLE & RESPONSIBILITIES OF FASHION BUYERS IN MARKETING" is overlaid in the center in a bold, black, serif font, with horizontal lines underlining each word.

ROLE
&
RESPONSIBILITIES
OF
FASHION BUYERS
IN
MARKETING

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE FASHION BUYER

A fashion buyer is responsible for the products that the company sells, making fashion buyer jobs quite important for the company and for the brand that they carry. They oversee the development of clothes which are targeted towards a particular market and price range. A fashion buyer is responsible for the products that the company sells, making fashion buyer jobs quite important for the company and for the brand that they carry. They oversee the development of clothes which are targeted towards a particular market and price range. Depending on how big the company is, there might be one fashion buyer or a team of fashion buyers responsible for the clothes which the company would carry.

Most of fashion buyers communicate to both internal and external stakeholders, so proper public relations is a definite plus. They need to communicate effectively within the team, as well as the clothing suppliers and manufacturers so as to avoid misunderstandings which are very crucial in the fashion industry.

Fashion buyers typically work with the merchandising team, fashion designers, and department managers to decide on the right pieces which they will sell. They need to visualize the budget and the profits that the company would make, as well as how much they need to spend and they need to gain.

SKILLS TO BE A FASHION BUYER

- Good analytical skills
- Creativity
- The ability to recognise future trends
 - Excellent commercial awareness
 - Communication skills
- Confidence and presentation skills
- Ability to make decisions under pressure
 - Negotiation skills

A retail buyer needs a clear understanding of the customers they're buying for, the prices they're willing to pay and the likely demand for products. Reacting to, and most importantly, forecasting market trends and changes in demand, are key aspects of the job.



THE ROLE OF THE FASHION BUYER

The buying role differs between companies but all fashion buyers are responsible for overseeing the development of a range of products aimed at a specific type of customer and price bracket. There are various levels of seniority within a buying team, ranging from small independent stores, which may have one buyer who also participates in sales and promotion, to a major fashion multiple which has trainee buyers, assistant buyers and buying managers, headed by a buying director. The job title can also vary, most notably at Marks and Spencer, where buyers are referred to as 'selectors'. A member of a buying team need to be effective communicators as most of their time at work is spent liaising with suppliers or internal departments. Buyers usually buy merchandise for a specific product area. In a small company, this may be a very broad range, for example ladies' casual wear, including jackets, tops, skirts and trousers, but in a large multiple, the range is likely to be far more focused, for example men's shirts. Usually, the larger the company the narrower the buyer's product area is. It is probable however that a buyer for a very narrow product range in a large company will be responsible for a higher amount of financial turnover, owing to large quantities per style being sold, than a buyer for a broader product range working for a smaller retailer. If the range of product categories is large most retailers, including Marks and Spencer and Bhs, have separate buying departments or divisions for menswear, women swear and children wear. The responsibility for buying merchandise is subdivided into specific product ranges which may include jersey wear, knitwear, leisurewear, nightwear, swimwear, tailoring, underwear, eveningwear, footwear and accessories.

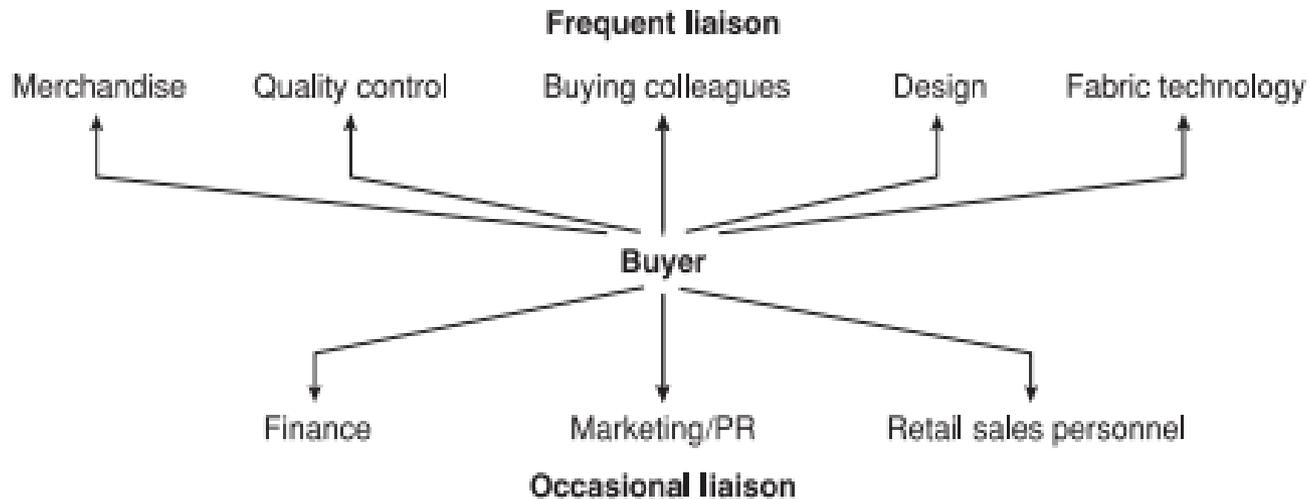
In larger companies' roles are usually more strictly defined than in smaller companies where the job may be more diverse in terms of products and responsibilities, calling for versatile buyers with a wide range of skills, as the job can sometimes extend into the creative and technical areas of design and quality control

. The buying role for small independent retailers and some department stores is quite different from working for a high street fashion chain store, as independents mostly buy ranges of branded merchandise without the opportunity to become involved in the design or development of the product. The buyer's role is usually different in America as it includes more administrative duties and financial input which in the UK are normally part of the merchandiser's job (Clodfelter, 2003). In the USA buying is often a subdivision of the merchandising team, whereas in many companies in the UK buying is perceived as the central role. The experienced buyer's role invariably involves travelling, mainly to see clothing suppliers and to gather trend information. A trainee buyer rarely travels abroad during the first year of employment. This gives a new recruit the chance to see how the head office operates and to assist the buyers before they embark on overseas trips. The first working trip for a trainee or assistant buyer is likely to be to Paris to view the trends at trade fairs and in stores, but after two or three years he or she can be travelling to several countries per season, depending on the retailer and the product area.

QUALITIES OF A SUCCESSFUL BUYER

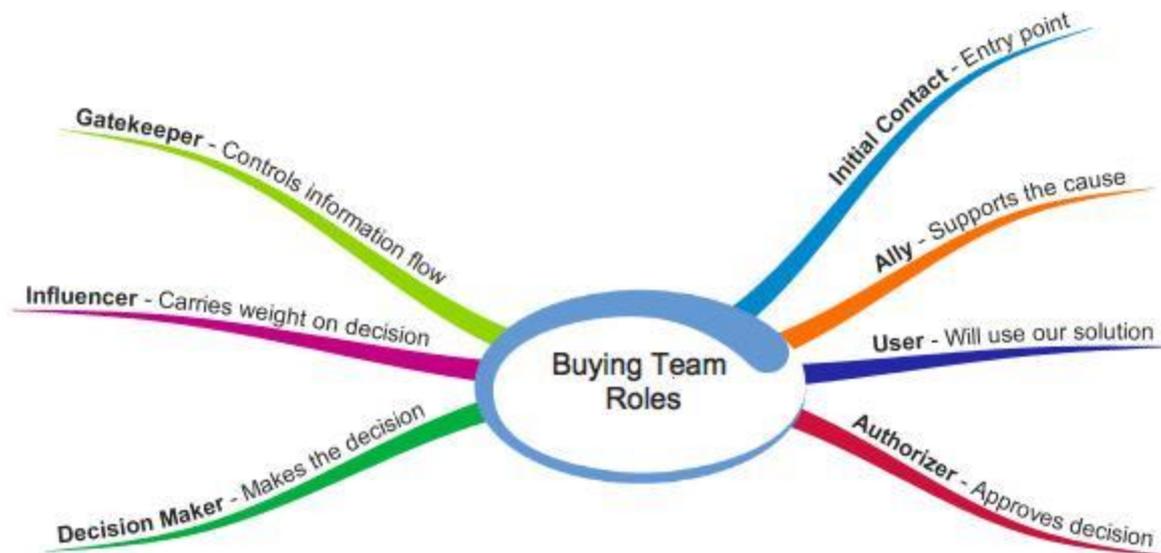
A fashion buyer needs to be versatile and flexible as the buying schedule may include sitting behind a desk one day writing reports and communicating by phone or email, travelling to Paris to identify forthcoming trends the next week, then flying to the Far East the following month to meet and negotiate with suppliers. A good buyer needs stamina but should also be enthusiastic, conscientious, professional, decisive, numerate, creative, imaginative and well motivated. To succeed in these career buyers need to have foresight and develop skills in people management and time management. It is rare to find someone with an equal balance between these qualities and skills and many buyers will excel in some while being only adequate in others. Although this list appears to be daunting, most of the skills are learnt within the job. Enthusiasm and self-motivation are possibly the most important elements as they cannot be taught; they are the main qualities that, together with experience or qualifications will help the buyer to obtain that all-important first job. It is very difficult to ascertain solely from CVs and interviews whether or not a person has the right qualities to be a buyer as most of these will only be developed by exposure to the fashion buying environment. If, however, you already have most of these qualities and the willingness to acquire the rest, you have the potential to be a successful buyer. Even with extensive skills and experience a buyer who is new to a company will require a certain period of training and readjustment to become familiar with different systems and terminology. Companies that do not recognise and plan for this factor could lower their profits as a result when the new buyer's range is launched.

THE BUYING TEAM



Buyers need to work closely with the rest of their buying colleagues, as their ranges need to be sold alongside each other in the same stores, and are likely to be purchased to be worn together. Buyers from different areas therefore need to liaise regularly to keep in touch with developments in ranges and to support each other. Most buying teams have regular, perhaps weekly, meetings Figure 2.1 Buyer liaison with internal departments. The Role of the Fashion Buyer 9 under the guidance of a buying manager. Some buyers may meet more often on an informal basis to update each other on ranges, and to ask for advice or opinions.

If there is a quality problem with a garment in the range and the buyer does not wish to reject it, another experienced buyer's opinion may be sought to help the decision-making process. Buyers usually travel together on business trips and can therefore consult each other for advice on the range. Buyers for product ranges which are closely linked (e.g. if one is responsible for blouses and another for tailoring) are likely to consult each other frequently, to ensure that the range is well coordinated. Sometimes the buyer may need to contact another buyer in a separate division of the company, so a ladies' casual wear buyer who wants to source a certain type of fabric may seek the advice of a casual wear buyer from a menswear retailer within the same store group.

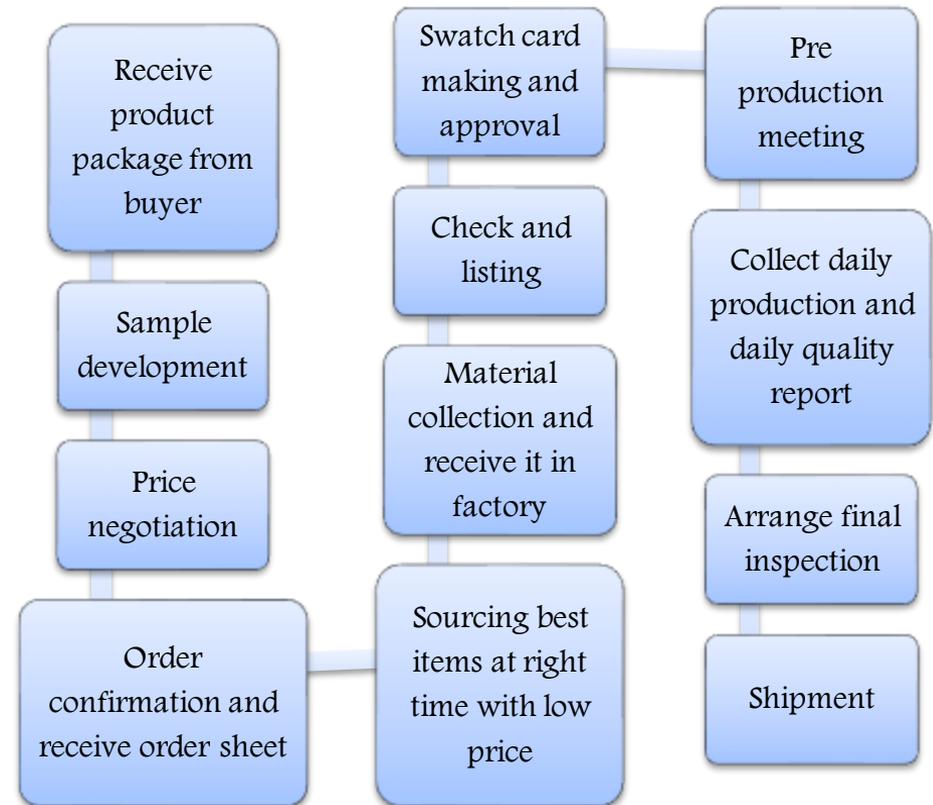


MERCHANDISE DEPARTMENT

The fashion buyer needs the commercial flair to buy a range, whilst the merchandiser needs the commercial acumen to enable the range to work successfully. Merchandisers interact very regularly with buyers, and are responsible for setting the financial parameters of a garment range. This can include creating a framework for the buying budget, defining the number of product types and determining the number of lines within a range. In effect merchandisers give buyers a shopping list of products in terms of prices (entry, mid or high) and the length of time which they are expected to be in store. Nick Atkinson, menswear accessories merchandiser at River Island, describes how his role works in practice: I sit side-by-side with the buyer and the rest of the team: working closely with an assistant merchandiser, allocator and senior allocator. My main responsibilities are minimising risk, maximising potential and planning a balanced range. We have a target of how much profit to make for the season and how much markdown we're allowed. Merchandisers need good computer skills and as the job is very numerical and analytical, being able to read figures and pull out the information is essential. Communication is also very important between the design, buying and merchandising teams. Merchandisers have a major role to play in many of the key meetings and processes within the buying cycle.

They advise buyers on target margins for the range – which may differ for certain garments depending on the country of origin, the flexibility and lead time of the supplier, and the balance of the margin across the whole range. If a product makes a lower margin than the target which has been set, it may still be approved if other products in the range make a higher margin to compensate for it. This is referred to as ‘marrying’ margins, and is usually acceptable if the average margin across the whole range equals or exceeds the target. Merchandisers liaise frequently with buyers and suppliers to place initial and repeat orders. This involves regular meetings with buyers to assess the progress of each style.

Flow chart of merchandising task



EXPERIENCE

A buyer's knowledge of merchandise stems from both education and experience. The ability to evaluate merchandise and judge whether it is suitable for a customer develops over years of examining all types of merchandise for quality, styling and price.

It is also very important for buyers to have store customer's wants and needs. Leslie Wexner customer's reactions to merchandise and its presentation, and overhearing their comments" helped him develop a retail sense.

RESEARCH

- Market and trend research becomes second nature to the buyer.
 - Demographics and psychographics.
- The effect of economic condition on demand for certain types and prices of merchandise.
 - Global influences on styling and sourcing.
 - Market and fashion trends.
 - Influence of the media and celebrities on fashion.
 - The competitor's merchandise offerings.

BOTTOM-LINE VERSUS CREATIVE ASPECTS OF BUYING

The buying process is part analytical and part creative. The mechanics involve knowledge of sales histories and the development of a merchandising plan.

Their increased responsibilities to the bottom-line leave many buyers no choice but to be just administration.

In industry jargon, they must find a balance between being number driven and merchandise driven.

The creative side of buying is the ability to spot trends and buy merchandise with sizzle that will appeal to customers. Buyers tend to play it safe, but they need to take more risk, especially now that the market is more fashion-oriented again.

BUYER-PLANNER SYSTEM

Some retailers separate buying functions into a buyer-planner system. Under this system, buyers are able to focus on shopping the market and merchandise selection as well as financial control, while planner concentrate on distribution.

Planners shape the size of the buy monitor adherence to the plan, plan distribution to individual stores and team up with buyers to maximize their business. Planners analyze regional differences, designating appropriate merchandise for particular stores based on sales histories of colour preferences, life-style needs, climate variations, ethnic tastes and so on. They also reallocate merchandise to stores where it is selling best and make sure basic merchandise is kept in stock.

Most stores now have computer-based forecasting and planning systems that include allocation.

THE BUYER AS EDITOR

Buyers can influence consumer buying to a large degree by their selection of merchandise, which narrows the choice for the consumer.

By determining what parts of a collection will be sold in the store and in what quantity, the buyer affects the public perception of a manufacturer's line. However, they have to show enough of a line or collection to represent them properly.

THE BUYER'S ROLE IN MARKETING

Ideas on how to market and sell merchandise are thought out ahead. The buyer makes plans for advertising, including direct mail and E-commerce, visual merchandising and special events.

ADVERTISING

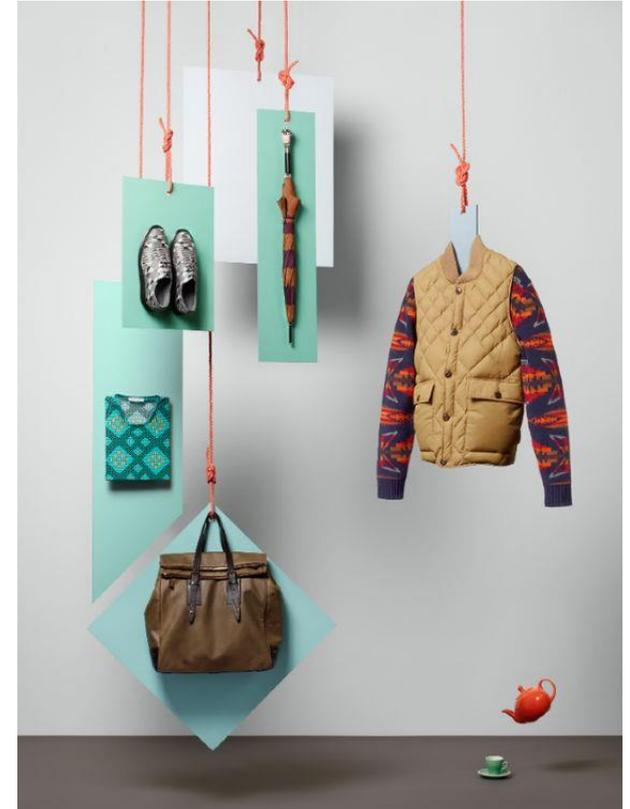
Buyers request ads on the basis of their merchandise plans and negotiate with vendors for co-op money. They must provide complete information about the merchandise—concerning fabric, colours, styling details price, and sizes—to the advertising copywriter. The garment or accessory itself must be given to the illustrator, layout artist or photographer.

The buyer helps determine the proportion and position of the ad and must carefully check ad copy for accuracy. He or she must then make sure that the merchandise has been delivered and is on the selling floor, with appropriate sign copy, when the ad runs.



VISUAL MERCHANDISING

- Buyers may also request window and in-store displays for particular merchandise.
- They must also make sure that a good selection of that merchandise is on the selling floor for possible customer purchase.



SPECIAL EVENTS

Buyers may initiate special events and fashion shows. For example, the buyer of a designer collection might arrange with the fashion office for a designer to make a personal appearance to introduce a new collection.

To evaluate marketing strategies, buyers compare sales statistics two weeks before the ad, presentation or event, the day of and two weeks after, they try to determine if these strategies were successful in promoting sales.

TARGET CUSTOMERS

The buyer tries to select the right styles, colour assortment, and fabrics at acceptable prices for their target customer. Buyer need to keep in touch with their customer's life-style to buy merchandise to fit their needs.

MICRO-VERSUS-MERCHANDISING

The large number of market segments, based on age, ethnicity and life-styles, there is increasing need for customizing merchandise, Micro-merchandising, identifying and serving one market-niche, is in response to the recognition of a diverse society with diverse taste and needs,

This means that national retailers must differentiate their merchandise from region to region, and store to store. Retailers such as J.C. Penney have decentralized buying systems that allow local buyers to vary assortments according to the needs of individual stores.

Some national retailers such as the Gap, are macro-merchandise that prefer to convey a unified image throughout the chain. They make some concessions to climate, but they want consumer to find the same Gap merchandise in every store.



THE BUYING-SELLING CYCLE

The buying and selling cycle is related to the fashion cycle of consumer acceptance. A buyer's responsibilities involve a complete cycle planning what to buy; searching, display and special events to promote merchandise; training sales personnel; and marking down leftover merchandise. The buying-selling cycle is constantly overlapping :new goods come into the store while other goods reach their peak or decline in sales. The buyer's job of identifying and interpreting consumer demand and evaluating current sales is a continuing process.

- Broad Assortment Buying
- Narrow and Deep Buying
 - Short-cycle Buying
 - Planning promotions
 - Planning Markdowns

REFERENCES

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THANK YOU
