

Bye-bye, body bashful - hello, body beautiful!

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What South African consumers can expect from the ladieswear category in 2018



We recently saw a global clothing retailer unwittingly become the target of consumer fury locally, as a result of their sizing. A disgruntled customer pointed out on social media the visible disparity between the store's sizing compared to other local retailers' size equivalent, with the retailer in question responding that their sizing was in line with EU standards.

Raynard Potgieter, Buying Director at Ackermans, explains that while the global retailer was following the EU size chart (which is different to the one used locally by South African retailers, such as Ackermans), retailers would be ill-advised to ignore the impact that sizing has on customers.

"In addition, the standardised measurements – which inform the sizing of garments – differ all over the world.

"A European garment, for example, will not necessarily be cut to the same size specifications as a South African garment, as the body measurements are shown to differ from the average European woman to the South African woman. It is critical that clothing retailers acknowledge and cater for this, taking our customer's unique requirements into account."

The value retailer performs rigorous sizing comparisons with a number of consumer focus groups, in order to offer realistic

sizing that best reflects and celebrates the South African form.

In addition to offering more accurate sizing, Potgieter explains that there is a broader industry movement towards embracing a variety of body shapes. "If you consider those who were considered attractive in the 50s, 60s and 70s, there was a very defined aesthetic and 'fashionable' body type, which was not very accommodating to those who did not fit within its narrow frame of acceptance.

"The rise of social media has driven globalisation, and we now have greater access to international trends – and not just from fashion centrals such as Europe or America, but also regions like Asia, India, Africa and the Middle East. The internet has enabled exposure to different cultures, which has led to a greater diversity of opinions and thought. All of this has resulted in a global community that is better informed, connected and welcoming of diversity."

Potgieter believes that retailers wanting to remain relevant need to understand their customers, and be attuned to their needs. "For us, it was important to be able to offer a wider range of sizes, and hence we extended our range."

This philosophy carries through to the retailer's underwear offering. Ackermans recently launched an extended line of stylish, affordable bras for larger-breasted women, ranging up to a G-cup – one of the very few retailers in the country to offer this cup size.

“We also realised that our customers who wear larger clothing sizes are comfortable donning form-fitting garments. She doesn’t want to hide her curves – she is confident in her body and embraces her shape,” says Potgieter.

There is also a departure from brands using conventional catalogue or fashion models to advertise their garments. Instead, retailers are seeking models or celebrities who embody a diversity of body shapes.

“Consider the more recent fashion or beauty campaigns; many of the women who appear in these are not models, rather, they are faces that you might recognise from TV or social media. This is part of a growing desire for relatability in consumer communications; brands are consciously and increasingly seeking representatives who are aspirational and positive role models, who embody the personality and diversity of their brand, and who their audience can identify with.

“It is critical that retailers continue to evolve with the needs of their customers, and consider how they can genuinely add value to their lives. Assortment, quality, and pricing are key, but it is also important to take into account the relationship your customer has with themselves and their bodies, and find ways to enhance this relationship and empower your customer through your offering,” concludes Potgieter.

“Expect to see a lot more realistic sizing in 2018, as retailers become more attuned to the needs of their South African female customers.”

Ackermans' Top Ladieswear Trends for 2018

Farewell to fuller-figure ranges

The future of fashion has fewer labels. There will be a move away from a separate 'plus size' range which is supposedly intended for anyone larger than a size 38. Instead, standard ranges will simply be extended to cater for a greater variety of body types.

Reveal not conceal

There is less concern with 'conceal', and more emphasis on reveal. In 2018, women are becoming increasingly body confident, and their choice in clothing reflects this. For those who wear larger sizes, there is less demand for baggy blouses and trousers that hide the shape (which, in contrast, usually results in the wearer appearing larger). Women will be embracing a more fitted silhouette that is designed to celebrate the body.

Bigger and bolder is better

Colours are brighter and prints are bolder. The old, outdated 'rules' such as 'don't wear light colours or prints as they draw attention to your size,' are not only ignored; South Africans are flaunting their dissent by donning beautiful neutrals and nudes, chunky stripes and exciting prints.

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