

# Fashion

Your Future With IFF

Take-away  
messages  
from the  
**2013 India**  
Fashion  
Forum. BY PRITI SALIAN

The 13th edition of *India Fashion Forum* was a three-day event attended by Indian fashion industry heavy hitters. The forum was held from March 20 to 22 at the Bombay Exhibition Centre in Mumbai along with two companion events, India Shoes & Accessories Forum and The Textile Show, both hugely successful in their own right. The Images Group's flagship event ended with the grand Images Fashion Awards, where the finalist were chosen based on things like growth in retail footprint, top-line sales and brand innovation.

## Sharing, Showcasing and Networking

This year's IFF saw the participation of many new fashion designers, stylists, journalists and bloggers. It was the first time in the history of IFF that fashion media was invited to participate in order to "influence the influencers." Several new regional, national and international brands also attended this event to exchange ideas, share business interests and create new fashion trends. Renowned fashion gurus discussed how the future of fashion retail in India can progress in a big way by taking just a few steps in the right direction. Here are the steps proposed at IFF 2013.

## 1. Adding a Mandatory E-dimension to Sales

The desire to save time and travel expenses and take advantage of discounts has veered youth toward large cities and toward online shopping. But the majority of retailers haven't been able to keep pace with online sales despite the web's growing popularity as a major distribution channel for fashion products. Anchal Jain, managing partner at IndEU Capital in Paris, suggested that retailers should strive to engage their customers emotionally and improve their shopping experience to increase traffic to their online shopping sites. Electronic retailing marks the future of retail growth in India.

## 3. Using Fashion Trend Forecasting to Increase Retail Sales

Due to quick shifts in consumer preferences because of changing fashion trends, products have suffered increasingly shrinking life cycles. To cope with this problem, it's essential to bring in the expertise of fashion trend forecasters to predict the styles, colours and designs of tomorrow. This approach offers many benefits to retailers, who can then better manage their inventory levels, which affect profits enormously. "Forecasting is scientific and technical and has to be taken seriously," said Lascelles Symons, head of design for women's wear at Splash. "Design cannot be understood sitting in front of the computer. It is important for one to travel, visit fairs and take help of forecasting agencies to know about the trends for

*Renowned fashion gurus discussed how the future of fashion retail in India can progress.*

## 2. Creating a Shift: From Catwalks to Sidewalks

"The concept of fashion is highly restricted in India, with [the] majority of the focus being on designer labels which are not available to the masses," explained Amitabh Taneja, chief convenor of IFF. He also suggested that the essence of fashion lies in premium, ready-to-wear brands that actually clothe consumers. The need of the hour is to bridge the communication gap between fashion brands and fashion media. Most fashion journalists and editors feature fashion couturiers but ignore brands. "Design will not have a wide appeal if it remains couture," said Tarun Tahiliani, a leading fashion designer from India. Therefore media involvement has become critical in bringing about change. "The idea of a fashion magazine is not just to create awareness but also increase the retail appetite," said Nonita Kalra, former editor-in-chief of Elle India. The responsibility of creating popular desire for brands lies with fashion writers. Minor and major fashion brands held exhibitions during IFF to attract participating fashion writers to their products.

## 4. Regional Retailers are the Fashion Biggies of Tomorrow

Some regional operators like Ritu Wears, Roopam & Roopmilan, Soch and Favourite Shop have made it big because of their sheer passion, hard work and seamless back-end operations. Experts emphasized that since regional players completely understand the local market, they should branch out to develop a pan-Indian presence by finding funding, working on efficient processes and overcoming their reluctance to move beyond their comfort zones.

Another way for regional retailers to expand is to affiliate with global brands in India. Global brands have deep pockets and technical expertise in terms of process, but they lack concrete knowledge of local tastes and preferences. "Local companies are more geared to creating relevance in the market they operate and creating relevance is important," said Rakesh Biyani, chairman of IFF and joint managing director of Pantaloon Retail. So the way forward is to go "glocal" — that is, to think globally and act locally. Partnerships between local retailers and global brands can benefit both parties.

## 5. Synergizing With a "Glocal" Partnership