

## Wills Lifestyle eyes 100 stores in two years

Saying it aims to create synergy between designers and mid to upmarket buyers, fashion week sponsor Wills Lifestyle plans to ramp up its signature stores across the country to 100 in the next two years from the existing 40.

'What we are saying is that designer outfits can be glamorous and yet wearable and affordable,' said Atul Chand, vice president (marketing) of ITC Lifestyle Retail.

'It's part of our wider engagement with India's fashion fraternity as we explore greater tie-ups with designers,' Chand told IANS.

A beginning was made after the fall/winter edition of the Wills Lifestyle India Fashion Week (WIFW) in April when the outfits showcased at the grand finale by the Rohit Gandhi-Rahul Khanna duo and Monisha Jaisingh were positioned along with the brand's range of men's and women's formal and casual wear and accessories at its stores across the country.

'It's been a huge success and increased our footfalls 15 percent. Designer wear now accounts for 15 percent of our sales and we hope to see it growing,' said Chand, who in the process rose from general manager to vice president of the company.

'Our two million consumers are getting exposed to designer wear like never before and are loving it,' he said, adding that Wills Lifestyle would now sign on Manish Malhotra and Rajesh Pratap Singh who will feature at the WIFW grand finale later this month.

'It's good for us as far as our consumers are concerned. Fifty percent of our designer sales are to existing customers and the other 50 percent to new consumers,' Chand said.

He explained that earlier 'price was the sole consideration but now you have customers who have greater appreciation for aesthetics, colour and design. I term this the evolution of the customer with a yen for tastefulness and fine living'.

According to an in-house survey, the average Wills Lifestyle customer is affluent, in the 25-35 years range and belongs to the corporate and entrepreneurial world.

'The SEC (socio-economic classification adopted by market survey companies) puts our customers at C, with A being the highest,' Chand said.

Thus, prices of the designer range begin at Rs.3,000 and go all the way up to Rs.15,000 - the same band as the other products at Wills Lifestyle stores.

But then, sponsoring the fashion week and retailing is not all that the brand is about.

'We share the vision of (WIFW organiser) FDCI (Fashion Design Council of India) on the business of fashion. We also believe in nurturing talent. Toward this end, we organised 'The Debut' ahead of the fashion week,' Chand said.

'The Debut' was a contest aimed at picking a design school student who would showcase his or her

collection with the crème de la crème of the fashion fraternity at WIFW.

The contest this year was open to students of the seven branches of the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) - New Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Kolkata, Chennai, [Hyderabad](#) and Gandhinagar - and covered various disciplines of design like fashion, leather, textile, knitwear and accessories.

The contestants underwent a rigorous three-round process to evaluate the collections on the basis of design, as also technical and commercial competencies.

The first round comprised an evaluation of an illustration-based design portfolio submitted by 200 hopefuls. Forty short-listed entrants then showcased garments converted from the entry illustrations at three regional rounds.

The 12 finalists showcased their collections here before designers Rohit Gandhi and the Shantanu-Nikhil duo, as also representatives of NIFT and WILW organiser Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI), with NIFT Delhi's Shivan Bhatia emerging the winner.

This apart, Wills Lifestyle also conducts the 'New Faces Going Places' contest to select upcoming models to walk the ramp with their peers at the fashion week. It has also created a Hi-5 segment to enable five young designers make their WIFW debut.

*Vishnu Makhijani ( © IANS / India eNews)*