

New York Men's Fashion Week & Market Week Report

January 2017



Men's Fashion Week in New York is a loose term covering a number of shows which take place in New York, organised by separate and competing companies. This season the tradeshow, strangely, disconnected themselves from the men's runway show in February to remain in the traditional Men's Market Week dateline of the end of January. Over the previous three seasons, there had been a move to align the shows on the men's catwalk dates but this would have made the shows too late for most.

This season the tradeshow overlapped, to the obvious pleasure of the buyers and press who could make the most of their time in New York. MRket and Project, which are now effectively one and the same show, were at the heart of the week; starting and finishing one day before the rest. MAN, Capsule and Liberty started and finished a day later.

Whilst the shows primarily target the affluent US and Canadian markets - there are no similar events in Canada - there is also a sizeable and growing Japanese buyer interest in the shows, especially at MAN and even some UK retailers now travel to the shows in New York and Las Vegas.

UKFT expected to see an uplift in US business in 2017, as this usually happens immediately after the election of a new President. During an election year, US business can be very subdued as consumers spend much of their time following the campaigns, with spending remaining comparatively low. The other menswear shows in London, Florence, Milan and Paris had started very well, with Florence in particular registering a very positive show. As this show took place barely a week after the inauguration of the USA's 45th President, we had high hopes for the show but were also anxious to see what effect, if any, the new President would have on the business climate.

MRKET

MRket is the mainstream menswear show, launched by the owners of MR Magazine in an attempt to bring the industry together under one roof. With the sale of the show and the magazine to UBM in 2016, the show now comes under the same ownership as Project, uniting the Javits Center menswear offer with a common entrance policy. In New York, MRket is by far the larger of the two shows but in Las Vegas, Project is the larger of the two shows.

This season saw MRket increased its size and numbers with a record-breaking UK group of 35 companies. MRket is home to the largest concentration of UK mainstream and classic brands including: Edward Green, Drake's, Barbour, Tateossian, the Oxford Shirt Company, Codis Maya, Alan Paine and Penrose.

The British Consulate General, DIT and UKFT collaborated on a special British promotion. The Consulate/DIT effectively booked and paid for a stand which featured a static mannequin display of British merchandise selected from across MRket and Project, a British meeting area with chesterfields, prominent Brits In New York signage and an afternoon tea on the first two afternoons. The promotion also included a special focus with live models on the first day of the show and two full page advertisements/advertorial in MR Magazine.

The UK exhibitors, once again this year, enjoyed a very central location in the show and the added size of the group and the promotion had the effect of dramatically raising awareness of a very strong British presence in the hall.

The exhibitors were delighted with the location and the additional attention.

Jim McHenry of US menswear agency The Bird Dog Group, a huge supporter of UK brands at the show reported that the show had been extremely positive, saying “We’ve had our busiest show ever!”

PROJECT

Project is a contemporary menswear show alongside MRket at the Javits Center. It has a good number of progressive UK brands including John Smedley, Lavenham, Sanders and Troubadour Goods. The show also benefits from a common entrance policy with MRket.

Now that MRket and Project are working in a positive spirit of collaboration, the two shows work very well together. MRket is very definitely the leader in New York but the opposite is true in Las Vegas. Project was smaller this season but the show still have a very high quality feel and its #bloggerproject Awards, also extending into MRket featured a number of UK companies.

This year there was an additional #britsinnewyork #bloggerproject which was won by UK manufacturer and UKFT member Chrysalis Clothes.

MAN

Based at a new location over two floors in Chelsea, this is a small but well curated show organised by MAN Paris. Brands include YMC, Kestin Hare, The Garbstore, North Sea Clothing, Universal Works, Les Basics and Folk and a number of European and US brands. The featured brands are all carefully selected designer casualwear brands, with an emphasis on quality products and design, rather than large brands.

MAN still stands out as the one New York show of real importance to Japanese retailers. They may also visit Capsule and Liberty but they start their day at MAN.

The new location and complimentary VIP shuttle service from Tesla Motor Cars give the show great visibility. There was also some live radio broadcasting and other events to take the show out of the pure tradeshow environment to a wider audience.

The new location works well with lots of natural light but some of the exhibitors on the second floor felt that the second floor lacked the footfall of the first floor.

One radio commented very aptly on the predominance of checked (or “plaid”) shirts and beards at the show as this and the indigo trend were very much in evidence.

CAPSULE and LIBERTY

Capsule and Liberty have collaborated on their shows in New York for the past few seasons but this year they physically condensed themselves and co-located their shows into Pier 94 for the first time. The reasons for this are not entirely clear but it is likely that both required slightly less space. It is also possible that Agenda wanted to take the adjacent Pier 92 for two of the three days.

Whilst the shows are organised separately, they operated a common door policy. Pier 94 has three long wings. Liberty retained the long central and right hand wings and Capsule took the left wing.

Most of the British brands were located in Capsule, as were the smaller than usual group of brands showing under with Tomorrow Ltd showroom. There was some confusion as to who was actually showing at Liberty as, until very shortly before the event, the show roster showed a number of British brands who were not actually there. The Capsule listing was accurate.

Generally speaking, Capsule appeared more vibrant and interesting than Liberty this season. Both have exchanged exhibitors over the past few seasons and both have different areas of strength. Liberty remains stronger in the men's indigo and denim area with a number of very well known brands, while Capsule was more of a design-led this season.

Overall Footfall and Business

Whilst the organisers of the New York shows do not publish attendance figures, the general feeling from UK and other exhibitors was that the shows had performed well, with Mrket and MAN reporting especially strong shows. There was evidence of orders being placed, especially in MRket, Project and MAN. Footfall felt slightly down in Capsule and Liberty, partly as many of the internationals appeared to concentrate more of their time on MAN. Capsule and Liberty are also major players in Las Vegas and would expect to see more buyers there later in the season.

UK exhibitors who are experienced or represented in the market, generally outperformed those who did not. Whilst it is not necessary - or sometimes financially advisable - to have an agent in the market, the ability to engage with buyers in advance of the show to encourage attendance and place orders made all the difference. Some of the most successful UK brands at the shows do not have an agent but they have good customer lists and made appointments with buyers well in advance of the market. This made all the difference.

Whilst many in New York are nervous about the US's prospects for the long-term under the 45th President, the general business feeling was felt to be positive at the time of the shows. Whilst there have been some reports of a dampening of the mood since the Market Week, this is not confirmed as a general trend, although there are lingering concerns over the liquidity of a number of US store groups. This was a topic of conversation among Italian exhibitors also. In addition, we are beginning to see concerns arising over the negative

effects to US tourism as a result of the 45th President's attempted travel ban and other policies.

It is still apparent that most US department stores and independents remain slow to use online as a way of generating sales. The main reason for this is felt to be the high cost of shipping in the US. It is almost as expensive to ship from the East Coast to the West Coast as it would be to ship from Europe into most US cities, leaving consumers just as well off shopping on the international sites.

The image of the UK in the USA remains largely positive. The UK is seen as an important and valued business partner by buyers and agents alike and the Consulate's promotion with MRket was extremely well appreciated by buyers, exhibitors and guests. Brexit does not have the negative connotations it does in some of our EU markets and a number of US buyers were reported to be requesting flexibility to pay their bills in sterling with some even offering to pay early to take advantage of the weakness of the British pound. This trend is expected to continue.

Paul Alger of UKFT said: "Overall, this has been a very positive New York Men's Market Week. We have seen buyers from across the USA, Canada and even Japan. We are here at the right time, as UKFT expects the US to be a good market for British menswear. We are especially delighted this year to have the support of the British Consulate and DIT at MRket and Project, investing in the soft-power of our established presence here in New York."