



UKFT Report: Paris Women's Fashion Week

September 2016

Background

Before compiling this report on Paris Women's Fashion Week (PFW), we thought it was worth looking back at the report from the previous season. Paris remains the largest and most international women's market and fashion weeks but the market is changing dramatically and Paris is now beginning to understand that Paris Fashion Week has to change with the times. For some of the show organisers this has come as a monumental shock and they are beginning to fight back, in an attempt to attract back some of the newer stars of the industry from the multi-brand showrooms. For the showrooms the change is nothing new. They saw it coming, indeed they owe their initial existence to and have grown at the expense of the weakening shows. However, for both the shows and the showrooms, falling visitor numbers across the city as a whole, the changing emphasis in the industry away from the Wholesale Only model towards Multi-channel and, specifically in the UK, the wave of pessimism brought about by Brexit has meant that exhibitor numbers are no longer rising steadily year on year. This impacts directly on the prevailing mood at the showrooms and the trade shows as there is clearly a huge surplus of supply to demand.

The September 2016 Paris Fashion Week was the second edition after the November terrorist attacks in Paris. Attendance at the March editions had been substantially down by most accounts but many American and Japanese buyers and press returned to Paris for the first time in September 2016. However, the mood was more downbeat. Not all the buyers returned. Especially lacking were a lot of the Chinese and Russian buyers. Whilst there was still a lot of activity in town, one indicator of the lack of buzz was that many of the restaurants traditionally frequented by buyers and exhibitors were quiet. In addition, Paris's department stores which have been popular with Chinese consumers for several seasons were deserted as Chinese tourists look to what they perceive as being safer cities including Munich, Dusseldorf and Copenhagen.

The Tradeshow

Première Classe and Tranoi were the largest tradeshow with 630 and 667 exhibitors respectively. They outperformed most of the other shows but experienced lower attendance in line with the prevailing mood of the market. The new Première Classe and Paris sur Mode dates from Thursday to Monday caused a lot of confusion, especially with buyers and exhibitors who had booked their trips according to the old dates. Similarly, the new Paris sur Mode location on Place de la Concorde was not an immediate hit with buyers and some will take a while to get used to it. Exhibitors felt that Tranoi Carrousel and Bourse were busier than Tranoi Cité de la Mode but some very good quality buyers also made the trip to Tranoi's newest venue, some on the free shuttleboat which ferried buyers between Tranoi Carrousel to Tranoi Cité.

Whilst WOMAN remained popular with buyers especially from the USA and Japan, it too was affected by Paris's fragmented nature and some Asian buyers were visiting their existing customers without taking the time to look at new collections. Vendôme Luxury felt much quieter than usual, partly as the Middle Eastern and Russian mainstream "luxury" buyers it has traditionally attracted were not in town. The organisers' decision to condense the smaller show into one compact venue (the Hôtel Meurice) paid off financially for the organiser but left the show feeling cramped and there were not enough new and interesting collections to attract in the Asian buyers.

Most notably, Zipzone's second showing in Saint-Germain-des-Près was a disaster as exhibitors packed up and left the show on the second day on the grounds that no buyers were attending. At the time of compiling this report, the show's website was showing that dates and venues for 2017 are not yet confirmed. UKFT has removed this event from its TAP supported group.

The Multi-brand Showrooms

Overall, the multi-brand showrooms performed well. Whilst they were not immune to the downturn in the number of buyers in Paris for PFW, exhibitors at most of them said they had seen their customers with expected orders pretty close to their expectations. Buyers were clearly happy to spend more time at the showrooms as they believe they benefit from an edited look and the support of the showrooms who help them to select collections. This is especially important for buyers from China and Russia who often need more help. However, experienced buyers continue to like the more intimate atmosphere offered by the multi-brand showrooms and many trust the editing of the collections.

Buyer Attendance and Market Trends

Official figures are not released by any of the tradeshow or showrooms during PFW, but it was clear from the start that the business in September would be 'softer' than usual. In March 2016, UKFT predicted that 2016 would be a key tipping point for the realignment of the business model, away from the pure wholesale model towards a new multi-channel model. At the same time, UKFT predicted that there would be a continued shift of exhibitors and buyers from some of the smaller and weaker tradeshow to the showrooms and some shift of companies away from the larger shows, also towards the showrooms. Both predictions appear to be coming true. Of the 300 UK companies showing in Paris, 110 showed with UK-based multi-label showrooms compared an only slightly larger 139 at the tradeshow. The others were in non-UK showrooms, often Italian, or at other shared or individual locations in Paris. The increase in space costs at some of the better showrooms means that some of the showrooms have begun to price themselves out of the market at precisely the time when the shows are doing their best to keep costs down.

Indeed, the larger shows have woken up to the challenges they face from the showrooms and have started fighting back. Tranoi in particular has substantially increased its greeters at the show and was on a charm offensive to win back the right exhibitors and buyers with a more welcoming and 'edited' offer for buyers who have tighter budgets and less time in Paris. Première Classe is doing its best to keep show costs as low as possible to attract bright new talents to the show.

On the buyers' side, buyers were buying cautiously from brands they knew already, mostly by appointment at both the more established shows and showrooms. Newcomers had to have something especially remarkable or interesting to get buyers to commit their budgets. There were reports of a number of larger US stores who had delayed payments to designers, including one or two household names. American buyers who are always cautious in the run up to a Presidential election were reported as being more optimistic about the market in 2017, regardless of who wins the Presidential race. On the other hand, some regions of the world were watching these elections very closely as they may have an important effect, positively or negatively, on the mood of global trade.

Korean buyers were reported as being remarkably positive but Chinese buyers were less so. Reports of a downturn in Chinese business weighed heavily on some of the French and Italian brands who have concentrated on China to make up for slowing business in Europe. On the other hand, Japanese buyers were still very much in evidence at most of the shows, albeit in smaller group numbers and with shorter travel itineraries.

A number of buyers, especially from Japan and the USA were said to be aware of the weakness of sterling and some companies said that they had been able to use the weakness of the currency to their advantage.

Whilst the general perception of exhibitors was that traffic was down across the whole of PFW, a number of companies reported good business at the show. Some of this can be seen in the quotes at the end of this report. And the good news was not limited to the more established brands by any means as some of the first timers did take orders at the show with companies they were meeting for the first time.

Paul Alger, director of international business development at UKFT said: "This has been a tough edition of Paris Fashion Week for many, with fewer buyers in the market looking for new brands. Buyers are concentrating on venues and collections with something unique to offer at the right price. Whilst some exhibitors were disappointed this season, many have a positive story. Product and location have been the key factors. Paris remains the most important of the Fashion Weeks but show organisers need to work together to help buyers to make the most of their limited budgets and time – a myriad of competing locations far away is not the answer. Similarly, designers have to understand how the market has changed and that multi-channel is here to stay!"

The Brits in Paris Map and Promotion

The UKFT #BritsinParis map was originally designed to help buyers to find their way around what was, even 10 years ago, an overheating market. Again this year, the map was well received and distributed at all the showrooms and trade fairs with a UK presence. A number of international buying houses have now started to request advance copies of the map to plan and support their buying trips.

The map was organised and financed by UKFT and featured approx. 300 UK designers. The companies were also invited to be part of UKFT's #britsinparis promotion @UKFTorg on Twitter and Instagram and the Video Loop.

Images of the group can be found on the UKFT [Facebook page](#).

The Brits in Paris map can be downloaded [here](#).

View the film loop on [YouTube](#) .

Recap of key trends at this edition of Paris Fashion Week:

These were the following key trends and issues from this edition of Paris Fashion Week:

- There were fewer buyers in town with most staying for shorter periods. As last season, buyers prioritised shows and showrooms in central locations within 15 minutes of the main Concorde-Bastille axis (including Première Classe, Tranoi Carrousel and Bourse, Tomorrow Ltd, Polly King and Touba).
- The decision to change the dates of Première Classe and Paris sur Mode from Friday-Monday to Thursday-Sunday caused a lot of confusion, especially with buyers and exhibitors who had booked their trips according to the old dates.
- Europe is gradually moving away from the Wholesale model – the focus of the event is no longer just about writing wholesale orders. Wholesale needs to be seen as one part of a Multichannel strategy and start-ups have to get used to this very quickly.
- Wholesale remains an important part of the business in Japan, the US and other parts of Asia
- Asian, Russian and Middle Eastern buyers were fewer in number and prefer the showrooms to the trade shows as they are advised on brand selection and how to buy.
- British designers are still respected and sought after
- Commercial lines are now being purchased earlier in the season at the same time as Who's Next, Tranoi Preview and the designer pre-collections
- Paris needs consolidation and more partnership if it is to keep its place as the international capital of fashion. The combination of Capsule with Paris sur Mode is a good start but more needs to happen quickly if Milan and Shanghai are not to supplant Paris with a more user-friendly offer
- The BritsinParis map in its printed and online forms remains popular with buyers (not just for finding UK brands)
- Whilst less business is actually written at the shows than in the past, exhibitions and showrooms remain vitally important for new and established companies looking to develop their multichannel business including online retailers, trading companies and investors especially outside Europe

Quotes:

Audrey Khew, Sales Manager for Markus Lupfer with Tomorrow Ltd showroom: “This has been a really Fashion Week for us and we saw more clients than we expected to see. We were super busy!”

Charlotte Zimbehl of Charlotte Zimbehl at Tranoi Cité: “I was disappointed this season. I think we were too far away from the main Carrousel and Bourse venues and we needed some of the big brands that get good and relevant buyers and drive traffic.”

Ying of Pig Chicken and Cow at Première Classe: “This was our first time at Première Classe. We enjoyed the show. Our scarves were very well received and we have to follow up with a lot of potential customers”.

Paula Fernandes at Year One, showing at WOMAN: “We felt the show was slow although that seems to have been the trend at all the shows in Paris last week. We were quite hidden, to the

point that one of our current buyers totally missed us and had to return the next day - luckily for us they took the time to come back! However, we did meet the buyer or one famous French department store and if that order comes through it will all have been worth it.”

Alan Buanne of Buanne at D/Ark showroom: “My bag collection received a positive reaction at D/Ark showroom from many stores including Italy and the USA, who bought the range, Barney's New York are also interested in picking up the collection. Thank you for your support.”

Marianna Jungmann of Marianna Jungmann at Four Marketing: “This season the support of DiT and UKFT helped me bring my brand Mariana Jungmann to Paris. We were in a lovely showroom called Four Marketing, which allowed us to open two new markets for us: Saudi Arabia and Australia.”

Eleni Malami showing for the first time at Première Classe Tuileries: “This was my first ever trade show and I went in with relatively few contacts. Première Classe was the best way for me to launch my collection to a wide international audience. I took one order from a major Japanese department store and have started serious conversations with retailers in Hong Kong and Abu Dhabi which I hope will lead to some additional business.”

Angela Quantrell of AQ Market Showroom: “This season we were in two spaces in the Marais. One with Brits and the other with designers from Jakarta whom I also mentor. We had three well known British designers in the group including Faustine Steinmetz, which was a definite pull. Between these and my own contacts, we had a steady flow of great buyers. We had virtually no USA “drop in’s” but we did see mot of the regulars and my Indonesian designers saw the best buyers from the Middle East and some new buyers from China and Japan. We are developing a reputation for bringing cool designers to the market!”

Matthew Waters of M.Agency: “This was our best season yet. We had a strong mix of designers, plus we moved to a much better area of Paris which really suits the level of store we are targeting. A lot of the buyers dislike the Marais/Bastille area as it is hard to get to, especially when they are staying more in the 1st arrondissement. All our appointments came to the showroom which was super positive, but we did end up with approx. 30%/35% orders yet to be confirmed. A lot of stores and territories are really struggling so a lot of budgets are being slashed. This means that buyers’ trips are also being made shorter so they have less time to visit everyone.” He added “Our main issue with Paris at the moment is that the landlords are putting up the rental fees and the Euro-Sterling exchange rate means that our costs are massively increasing. Paris is hard as it is over-crowded with showrooms and designers, but things are getting easier as fewer designers can afford to keep showing there.”

Jennifer Maclellan Murray of Scotria showing for the first time at Plan8 showroom: “The TAP grant enabled Scotria, an emerging luxury handbag brand, to present it’s SS17 collection with Plan-8 showroom in Paris this season. During the show, we received particular interest from Japan and the US with in-depth conversations with both independent luxury retailers and department stores. We expect to secure orders from these territories as a result of being there in the near future”.

Fode Sylla of Touba Distribution showroom: “Following the 2015 terrorist attacks, Paris Fashion Week has begun to resurface but has not reached its usual speed yet . We felt an increase of at least 20 % in the number of buyers visiting compared to the March show, partly as overseas insurance companies are beginning to insure business travellers to France again. Some other fashion capitals have seen increases in buyer traffic due to the attacks as buyers waited for the storm to disperse. The atmosphere is still a touch cold in Paris but, provided that the political climate stays stable, we expect to see a definite rise in attendance and business for the Autumn/Winter 2017/8 sales season in Paris.”