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# Updated Looks Provide Boost to Men's Underwear

<http://www.wwd.com/menswear-news/clothing-furnishings/bold-colors-patterns-provide-boost-to-mens-underwear-sales-5348941?page=2>

Fashion will be the big story in men's underwear for spring and fall 2012.

Consumers are continuing to buy basic underwear for everyday use, especially in a down economy where the price-value equation is all-important. But experts say the appetite for bold, bright colors as well as a plethora of prints — for both special occasion and everyday wear — is expected to grow rapidly next year.

A number of men's underwear brands are heeding the call for fashion with an expanded range of silhouettes, whimsical patterns and motifs, and a rainbow of colors that are increasingly being featured on synthetics, especially microfiber blends with Lycra spandex that make colors pop.

Technology is also expected to be a main factor in bolstering sales in 2012 with high-tech antimicrobial and anti-odor applications as well as advanced moisture-wicking properties. The newest upgrade is an application in the yarn that regulates body temperature and keeps the wearer cool and comfortable without breaking a sweat. As an example, Jockey recently launched its Staycool collection with Outlast Technology that was originally created for NASA astronauts.

The penchant for fashion, function and technology is expected to play out strongly in a specific classification in the U.S.: all-over seamless underwear of microfiber or cotton blends. Seamless has been a big segment of the men's underwear business in Europe for the past decade, but it didn't hit U.S. shores until late 2009. This segment of the business is aimed at consumers who are confident about their physique and wardrobe and want to make a fashion statement, executives said.

The demand for performance underwear and T-shirts is being led by consumers who have become accustomed to wearing high-tech products that deliver fit and value tempered with a good dose of style and fashion.

Regarding trends, the top-selling silhouette over the past year has been the classic boxer brief. However, the elongated boxer brief is a close second. Executives compared the rising popularity of elongated boxer briefs to the innerwear-outerwear trend in women's undergarments, saying it's a key item for a growing fan base that wears the elongated style for both underwear and as exercisewear that has a sexy spin.

There's also a major debate in the marketplace over logos: Some brands are creating smaller, more subtle logos for a less commercial look, while others are continuing with oversize, in-your-face statements that validate the brand's DNA.

Regardless of the style, one thing is certain: the men's underwear business at retail is rapidly growing and the influx of fashion, color, prints and technology is expected to further propel sales in 2012.

In the 12 months ended August, the men's underwear market segment generated sales of \$4.2 billion, up 5.1 percent from the same year-ago figure, according to The NPD Group. Men's underwear sales rose 5.2 percent to \$2.58 billion while men's under tops posted a 4.8 percent gain to \$1.6 billion in the same time period.

Sizing up the demand for fashion, Sean Radford, senior director for men's design at Jockey International Inc., said color has been the main catalyst at retail this fall.

"Color has definitely been selling well, especially in synthetics. But there's also a greater demand for enhanced functionality and performance-based apparel," explained Radford. "Increasingly, men are not just shopping for functionality, but for occasion, fashion and performance, and Jockey plans to take steps to educate men to the benefits of occasional underwear dressing." He singled out the "fun, fresh patterns and prints" in Jockey's Elance and

Pouch collections as a key classification for 2012.

Radford outlined two new initiatives for Jockey's Sport group:

- Mesh panels that provide athletic mobility with additional airflow with contouring support for comfort and breathability while exercising.
- H-Fly styles feature lightweight, moisture-wicking fabrics that enhance comfort and support with Jockey's signature horizontal fly construction.

"The long-leg boxer is trending up and is the fastest trending style in men's underwear....I think it's being influenced by the sports market and soccer with major players like David Beckham," said Radford.

He added that Jockey is among the brands that will be downplaying logos in 2012.

"Logos have been trending well for the last 10 years, but we're taking it back...we'll still have a logo on the waistband but it won't be as bright or as loud," said Radford.

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Isaac Ash, president and chief executive officer of United Legwear Co., a licensee of Puma men's underwear and socks in the U.S., said the brand's hottest item for spring is a Pro Tech Cyclist elongated brief.

"We've had limited distribution of the Pro Tech Cyclist since last year but we'll be expanding colors and distribution next year because it's such a hot item," said Ash. "It's 80 percent tight mesh and it's designed around form and function with liquid titanium woven into the fabric to wick away moisture...men wear it like underwear and to work out in....Even my sports physician wears it to run in marathons because there's no chafing and no friction."

Ash noted that the Puma collection is also "about fun and color."

"The Puma line for spring and fall 2012 was inspired by the fastest man on the world — Olympic gold medalist Usain Bolt — who likes to wear underwear you can't feel on your body. The colors include neons, bright green, dark purple, teal, light blue, and the red, black and yellow colors worn by the Jamaican running team, which Puma sponsored for the Olympics," said Ash.

He further noted that the red jumping cat Puma logo will remain prominent and "highly visible" against contrasting backgrounds.

At Papi, the message will continue to be strong color and oversize logos, said Edwin Lozado, communications manager.

"Papi is always very colorful and for spring-summer 2012 we used a lot of bright colors and bold prints including our newest initiative, Colores, our latest packaged program featuring bold, solid colors with multicolored waistbands, as well as our Tribal collection with unique graphics in several colors," explained Lozado. "Last year, we saw camo in many ready-to-wear collections, and we took inspiration from that trend and re-created it for our Camo underwear and matching tanks."

Papi's colors will be inspired by different fortunes of the year with shades like yellow which represents prosperity, blue for good health, orange for courage, and red for passion.

Regarding the issue of larger or smaller logos, Lozado said, "Aside from bold colors and prints, Papi is known for its unique name and logo. We exaggerated the size of the logo in some of the collections, while in others we minimized dramatically which is something new for us."

He singled out the Brazilian trunk silhouette by Papi as the top-selling item.

"For us, color has been building over the past year and we've just launched a Sport collection in bright, athletic colors of bright green, and blue and red with black and white," said Jason Scarlatti, creative director of 2(x)ist. "We also have a collection called Colour with multiple colors for a trunk or brief."

He added that a line of brushed nylon and spandex called Touch to be introduced for spring will feature color combinations of hot pink and navy, bright orange and gray and purple and black.

Ralph Beyda, vice president of 2(x)ist, said the call for color inspired new packaging.

"Most companies show white on a box. If a customer is not a savvy shopper it looks like they can only buy white underwear. So, we have a clear window on the box in the shape of a brief and customers can see the color," said Beyda.

Addressing logos, Beyda said, "We'll be doing bigger, bolder logos like a wide silver waistband with 2(x)ist logos in silicone dots inspired by the news ticker in Times Square."

Nathan Romano, sales director for New Balance men's underwear, singled out two "major developments" for spring: A photo print application that's embedded in the fabric in patterns of bright orange, red and blue, and performance underwear that offers UV protection.

"We are starting to hear that consumers are wearing our 9-inch briefs for exercise, cycling and running. With UV protection we're giving them a secret benefit," said Romano.

A spokeswoman for Diesel said the brand will be "relaunching our Fresh and Bright program for fall-winter 2012 with bolder colors, a softer waistband and new silhouettes."

She said that Diesel will not be "playing down logos for men's underwear...however, we are offering alternative logos to our traditional large, maxi logo featured in the Fresh and Bright lines. The large logos are still selling very well as men like to have them showing from under their jeans. We have added new logos on the waistband that are more denim-inspired, referred to as 'Diesel Industry.'"

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