



Think It's Too Early to Sell Fall Apparel? Think Again

It's hard to even imagine having to start wearing fleece apparel right now while it's 90-some degrees outside. (In some places, it's even topping 100 on a regular basis.

Seriously, what's up with that, Arizona?) But, it's never too early to have a plan for your fall business. Now is about the time that companies are gearing up to place orders for fall apparel for back-to-school giveaways, employee appreciation gifts and more. So, to get us into the fall spirit (as we sit under the air conditioning vents and dream of the beach), we spoke with John Perez, marketing associate for Tri-Mountain, Irwindale, Calif.; and Doug Jackson, president of Storm Creek, Hastings, Minn., about trends, fabrics and sales strategies for the fall.

New Developments

The main thing that Jackson and Perez noted was that there are always new developments in fabrics—new techniques, technology and styles.

“Fabrics continue to become more unique each year with new knitting and weaving techniques,” Jackson said. “So our fabrics are getting softer, quieter, and better to the touch and feel. We’re working on a lot of packability in our product as well. We can make fully-insulated jackets now that pack into something the size of a Harry Potter book and become your pillow on an airplane. With the nicer coatings and fabrics, we can pack an item and still have it look good when pulling out of the packable pocket.”

Features like this are especially appealing to clients in the travel industry, or end-users who want to give their traveling employees an extra comfort on the road.

“With the travel industry experiencing record travel numbers, Storm Creek is continually working on lighter, softer and wrinkle-free fabrics to make life easier for everyone. We are also offering new, fun colors like marshmallow and cranberry this fall.”

While Storm Creek is putting a lot of stock into the travel industry, Tri-Mountain is turning its attention to another booming market: activewear.a





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“We are excited to bring to the market Tri-Mountain's Layer Kit,” Perez said. “This is a fabric we're using to reinvent corporate jackets and performance apparel. The material has an amazing drape and soft hand feel. It's unlike anything in our product line. The construction of the material conforms to the wearer, and provides a flattering fit, but is not constricting. This fall, we are releasing four styles: a men's and women's full-zip jacket companion set, plus a men's full-zip hoody and a women's full-zip vest. These styles will need to be seen up close to truly appreciate the innovation and design that we at Tri-Mountain have invested into Layer Knit styles.”

Think Light

While fall is when people really start to add more layers, it's often not necessary to don a parka just yet. That's why distributors should think more along the lines of lightweight apparel, rather than going right from shorts to faux fur.

“Soft shell jackets have been a real popular choice for fall apparel,” Perez said. “Soft shells are popular in retail, so customers looking for promotional apparel are mirroring the trend. And why not? Soft shells are great! [They are] very comfortable, breathable and practical. However, this is why we are super-excited about our Layer Knit apparel. We believe people will begin to transition over to Layer Knit as they see it up close and try it on.”

Jackson noted that, in addition to soft shell jackets, quilted vests and jackets are in high demand. “They are very lightweight, warm and soft to the touch,” he said. “The new packable quilted jacket is very light, and the fabric is extremely fine. Another item is our one-sided fleece layering piece. The fabric has a lightly brushed back side that will help keep you warm while maintaining a nice, clean look on the outside. It's made of poly span, but uses very high filament yarns, making it buttery soft to the touch.”

Again, in the heat of July, we can't even imagine donning a fleece jacket. We can barely even pull off a long-sleeve T-shirt without breaking into a full sweat. But, just like you should have a fire extinguisher in your house before you have a fire, end-users will want a jacket before it gets too cold out.

“I think the obvious answer is [to start selling] in the prior season, in summer and early fall,” Perez said. “For Tri-Mountain, when we release our year-end sale, that's when customers will see the discounts on fall apparel. However, I believe any time is the prime time to pitch fall apparel. Keep it fresh in customers' minds. Keep them thinking and up-to-date on what's ahead. So when they see another piece from a competitor, they will recall what you showed them and have a comparison in mind.”