

# “We have always been a value for money brand focusing on quality”

Smag, offers a rich collection of winter wear for men, which includes tees, sweatshirts, jackets and pullovers. With a strong R&D team that works on designs, the brand focuses on upwardly mobile young with its stylish, value for money offerings.

**Vikas Kharbanda**, Director, speaks about the brands collection, retail and prevailing market conditions.

## Tell us about your collection.

Brand Smag was launched in 1995. We offer lightweight T-shirts for winter in cotton and cotton Lycra and fancy fabrics, sweatshirts in light fabrics, sweaters in acro-wool and cotton. We also make pullovers mainly in cotton, jackets made with polyester, nylon and cotton. Most winter collection is in earthy colours. In recent years, bright colours are the new trend.

## Give more details about your jackets, sweatshirts and pullover collection?

Jackets are more in polyester and rich nylon base. Earlier, customers preferred cotton jackets. But now they want similar to what international brands offer. For example, lightweight jackets can't be made of cotton they have to be in polyester or rich nylon. We have both lightweight and heavy jackets. This season, lightweight jackets are in demand unlike previous years due to a change in climate.

Sweatshirts are basic round neck, front-open zip range and front-open zip with a hoodies. Zippers are more popular than hoodies which were in high demand earlier. Pullovers are mostly in cotton. We have made different types of basic cotton sweaters, sweaters in acro-wool which are lightweight. We also make heavy sweaters. But for the last couple of years, winters are not so strong so heavy sweaters don't have much demand. Therefore, we are only into lightweight cotton sweaters. The fits are smart and we have basic and regular fits as well. Different type of neck styles is popular.

## Which winter wear category is more in demand?

Jackets and pullovers have more demand. We have been making garments for bigger brands like Amazon, Madura, etc. Cotton pullovers are preferred but jackets are more popular followed by sweatshirts and sweaters.



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**The smart fit is more popular, however, we do regular fits also.**

**Though nothing is exact yet, we may come up with at least 15 EBOs in upcoming years.**

**Currently, we are available with 15 EBOs under the name 'Cottlin.'**

**The Eastern and Northeastern regions contribute largely to our overall growth.**



**Vikas Kharbanda**  
Director

'We target men in the age group 16 to 40 years. Meanwhile we are working on samples for the kids' which we will launch in the near future. It has a wider scope. Also, as men's segment has an enormous scope, we plan to have a better and firm base and then maybe move on to other segments in a couple of years.'

We believe in volumes and make sure quality isn't comprised. Smag's pricing is not low rather it is smart. The most important thing is to understand your customers.

#### Who is your target audience?

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#### What is your retail network?

We are available in MBOs, EBOs and a few LFS. Among these MBOs are a more reliable means. And then it's EBOs which help us build the brand. And LFS gives us more reach. We are looking at expanding more in both MBOs and EBOs. We are working on our EBOs under the name 'Cottlin', which are approximately 15 in number located in the northern states in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan.

#### Why do you have two different names: Cottlin and Smag?

We launched Cottlin in 2008, exclusively as EBOs to ensure the difference of retail between MBOs and EBOs. Smag is present through distributors all across India from Kashmir to Kerala. People all over India are aware about a brand called Smag

'We have always been a value for money brand concentrating on quality. The market has a large number of young people who have recently started earning, we have to look at their needs and specifications in terms of quality and fashion. Catering to the youth is our main focus since the beginning. We have our R&D team which gives us an edge over other brands. Since we are a value for money brand, our products are similar in quality and fashion to big brands but at a reasonable price.'

which doesn't create any confusion. We haven't entered the Kerala market yet, but by next year we would commence there well. Eastern India including Bihar, Orissa, Jharkhand, and the Northeast are the most promising contributors to our overall growth. We are opening EBOs through distribution channels across India. We haven't planned the exact number yet, it might be around 15 stores. Surely we will open in Patna, Bhubaneswar and Mumbai. It also depends on the availability of potential distributors. We are also e-retailing through two or three sites.



## Nowadays, jackets are more about making fashion statement.

### Comment.

It is true. India doesn't have heavy winters like Europe. Here people can't go out in fur jackets. It is more of a fashion statement among Indian customers.

## Do you think demand for sweatshirts has overshadowed jackets market?

I don't think. Each segment has its own set of customers.

## How has customer behaviour changed?

Customers today are well informed. When they step out to shop, they know exactly what they want. There are brands like Duke and Monte Carlo which have a different set of clientele. A customer will go to a brand that attracts them. The branded segment, however, is not more than 10 per cent. The rest is unbranded or unorganised market.

## Are customers more inclined towards brands today?

Yes, there are shifts in customer's taste and outlook. It also depends on the mindset of a person. Some people buy quality products regardless of the brand name, while there is a section that gives more importance to a brand name when shopping.

## Are brands compromising on quality to meet customer's price brackets?

Indeed, the youth, today, is very brand conscious. They would specifically go to a particular store to buy a product. However,

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a large number of people still buy garments without focusing too much on the brand name.

## How important is price?

The upper class is not affected much but middle class and upper middle class definitely look at the price component while purchasing a product.

## Does the discount strategies used by bigger brands, affect you?

Not really. Even if they put a 20 per cent sale and we have a 10 per cent sale, our products are still cheaper. Customer mobilisation through discounts, do not work as effectively in all cases.

