

## **Roundtable Presentations and Discussions** **Designs and Markets: Post 2004 Scenario**

Design is going to be a driving force. Markets are becoming focused on individual customers and their interests are being looked after by a seamless supply chain through partnerships which are synergistic and responsive. Design is no more esoteric. It is a benefit which the customer seeks for adding value to his life and the environment.

Concerns regarding the role designs will have in the rapid globalization process sweeping across the world, the dove-tailing of the global consumer trends and the local ethnic design orientation, retaining the strong social and cultural identities while conforming to the global fashion trends, were the recurrent themes in the roundtables conducted during the 2<sup>nd</sup> IFFTI Annual Conference.

The global paper argued that the regional initiatives and arrangements have to remain consistent with the multilateralism in the WTO framework, and warned that the global sourcing parameters have made it mandatory for firms world over to re-orient their manufacturing and marketing strategies. It has to be understood that investing in Information Technology is not an option but a necessity for the new millennium. The framework proposed of win-alliances in the fashion supply chain partnerships is an important decision for the industry.

The time-poor, leisure-starved customer is the central focus of a newly emerging seamless supply chain. In a world of global clothing trade without restrictions, it is likely that the search for margins, differentiation, and just-in-time delivery will give rise to a vastly different paradigm for the fashion business.

The role of Information Technology and e-tailing with the “clicks and mortar” in the early years of the new millennium are expected to shape the contours of the fashion industry.

In the European Perspective, Italy, Holland, France and UK were represented.

Italy highlighted the role of cultural icons and strong traditions which have the capability of influencing the fashion directions of the world. The success of the entrepreneur-driven small and medium enterprises in creating modern fashion systems is a corollary to the Italian approach.

UK is increasingly focusing on value addition through design, merchandising, and retailing, and the new communication and e-business technologies are the frontier areas which are the main concerns.

France is also gearing up for harnessing technology and design for developing strong marketing strategies. The French point of view centered around breaking barriers between design and management for the benefit of healthy growth of the fashion industry.

The Netherlands perspective clearly is focused on global sourcing and design strategies, since manufacturing has virtually disappeared from the country.

The Asian points of view were represented by India, China, and Hong Kong.

India advocated the potential of becoming a creative marketer of apparel for global markets, being a country which is endowed with a fiber-to-fashion supply chain. The stagnant prices and the creeping inflation in developing countries are creating a situation which calls for new product market strategies to increase premium in prices and market share. In the post-MFA scenario with the increased outlay in technology upgradation and the competitive ability, the Indian exporters are enthusiastic about increasing their export performance.

China focused on how ethnic products and fashion appeal can through a gradual process be brought to the main stream of designs and markets. The need for high quality human resources has been highlighted in this approach for transforming the fashion industry.

In addition, Hong Kong brought out the significant impact of casualization and sports-impacted fashion in the international fashion scenario. The need for region development strategies in preparing for the challenges of the new millennium was highlighted.

Australia and Southeast Asian region were represented by Australia, Singapore, and Taiwan.

Australia presented the impact of globalization on design and innovation, and cautioned that it is important not to become copycats but to push for design originality. The approach envisaged a flexible orientation to create a proactive learning organization in the fashion industry.

Singapore examined the impact of lowering of customs barriers, and held the view that for the countries which have the natural and factor endowments, the dismantling of restrictions and lowering of customs duties may prove to be very advantageous.

The Taiwanese called for increased customer education in these days of aggressive marketing brought to focus a new urgency in this regard.

The North and South American Roundtable brought the ideas and concepts from Brazil, USA, and Canada.

The Latin American perspective definitely sees a very important role for clusters in export development. It is clear that a comprehensive strategy to achieve high export performance for Brazilian textile and apparel industry with a planned investment outlay in medium to short term has been put in place, which can serve as a model for other developing countries.

The U.S. viewpoint presented the scenario of a new connectivity emerging between the ways of living and the fashion linking apparel, home furnishings, and automobiles in its span. The advances in fiber technologies are expected to play a very significant role in shaping the future fashions. The emergence of distributors instead of the traditional retailers with focus on logistics is a major development in the new fashion system. The flows of capital to the textile and apparel and retail sector is going to be an important concern as other opportunities beckon the investments.

Canada joined hands with the US in drawing up the consumer profiles in the first decade of the new millennium. The need for increased integration of retailing with the Information Technology, and the enhanced awareness of recycling, disappearance of catalog retailing as we know now, are some of the highlights in this scenario.

Roundtable Discussions unraveled the concerns and issues before the global fashion industry, and showed the directions for designs and markets in the highly competitive global trade which offers simultaneously immense opportunities and challenges. The great intellectual power which is available in every region, guiding the human resources development for shaping the fashion industry, will continue to make the constituents stronger in the days to come.