

Mending Clothes: Brand Renovation in Apparel

Summer 2025

Introduction

Apparel brands are not immune to the headwinds that all sectors are facing. Consumers are wary of spending in an uncertain climate, supply chains are being upended, and a once-in-a-generation pandemic is only right behind us. Surely these pressures are a driving force behind the muted growth—and even drastic decline or bankruptcy—of multiple mainstay Apparel brands since 2020.

But macroeconomic challenges do not tell the full story. Many storied Apparel brands are struggling to stay—or even become—relevant to modern consumers. Some are dated. Others are stodgy. Yet, they all hold a priceless asset: a strong heritage—sometimes going back centuries—that drives awareness and positive sentiment. To become relevant again, these brands must translate their enviable heritage into a growth engine.

Notable Bankruptcies *Since 2020*

- Ascena (Ann Taylor, Lane Bryant)
- Brooks Brothers
- David's Bridal
- Escada
- Express (+ Bonobos, UpWest)
- Forever 21
- J.Crew (+ Madewell)
- Lucky Brand
- Tailored Brands (Jos A. Bank, Men's Wearhouse)
- True Religion

That is where brand renovation comes in. If your established Apparel brand is underperforming, it is not enough to just refresh a logo. Successful renovation requires a growth strategy that touches all the key facets of your business—and one that is grounded in fact-based and unbiased insights.

Signs It Is Time to Renovate

Remaining relevant in Apparel is an ongoing journey; however, there are clear indicators of when it is time to initiate concerted renovation efforts. A comprehensive diagnostic of market trends, sales performance, consumer perspectives, and competitive positioning will surface those indicators.

Market

The context your brand is facing



- Is your brand playing in a market that has grown over time?
- Is your brand playing in a market that is projected to grow in the future?
- Do you feel unprepared to tackle headwinds in your brand's market?
- Are you unsure of how to capitalize on the tailwinds in your brand's market?

Performance

The health of your business



- Is your brand's revenue and / or share declining in a growing market?
- Are parts of your brand's assortment underperforming expectations?
- Does your brand have excess inventory?
- Is your brand overly reliant on promotional pricing?
- Is your brand losing distribution points?

Consumer

*The perspectives
on your brand*



- Is your brand's consumer base small?
- Is your brand's consumer "aging out"?
- Is your brand overly reliant on repeat consumers and not securing new ones?
- Do consumers view your brand as on the decline?
- Do consumers feel disconnected from your brand and its ecosystem?

Competition

*The brands
challenging yours*



- Are consumers buying more from brands other than yours?
- Are other brands better at appealing to a multi-generational consumer base?
- Do other brands have a more relevant assortment and stronger distribution?
- Do other brands have a more engaging ecosystem of consumer touchpoints?

If the answer to these questions is more often "yes" than "no," it is likely time to focus on renovating your Apparel brand. Doing so will provide the foundation for your brand to benefit from market tailwinds, develop a winning assortment, gain points of distribution, bring in new cohorts of consumers, and outperform the competition.

Renovation Strategy

Once armed with a fact-based diagnostic, Apparel brands are ready to develop and implement a renovation-focused growth strategy. This strategy should be grounded in a relevant and differentiating brand promise and should serve as a roadmap for your consumer, product and pricing, channels, and marketing.

Brand Promise

Updating your brand promise to be more relevant and differentiating is a key step in renovation. The goal is to arrive at a promise that maintains the most compelling aspects of your brand but that also leans into the ethos of modern consumers.

“Abercrombie **isn’t a brand where you need to fit in—it’s one where everyone truly belongs.** We lead with purpose, and that inclusive and equitable spirit is woven throughout all we do.”

– CEO, ABERCROMBIE & FITCH

Abercrombie & Fitch

- A&F was historically associated with “cool kids” and exclusivity
- Facing increasing backlash, A&F updated its brand promise to be more inclusive in 2022—focused on belonging and authenticity
- **Results:** Went from -2.8% revenue decline '15-'19 to +17.8% growth '21-'24*



**Abercrombie brand only (excludes Hollister)*

Consumer

Brands that develop multi-generational consumers

outperform over time.

In order for your brand to grow, reaching younger consumers is often key. However, it is also important not to alienate longtime and loyal consumers when doing so.

Balancing the established and the aspirational can be a tall order. In order to succeed, it is critical to clearly define a target consumer—and avoid the “tragedy of the commons” by trying to appeal to everyone.

A good rule of thumb for a healthy, renovated brand is to have at least one-third of consumers each year be new. This proportion ensures your brand is experiencing a regular amount of growth while also remaining true to your dedicated and repeat consumer base.

DIESEL®

*“The power of Diesel is that you **can talk to so many people**. Diesel is all about fun, enjoying life, bringing excitement in an experimental and unexpected way...**It’s how young people are today.**”* – CREATIVE DIRECTOR, DIESEL



- Diesel was struggling to bring in younger consumers
- Conducted research among 10K consumers in 2020, identifying four archetypes—including “trend hungry teens” to reach through authenticity and nostalgia
- Consumers ages 16-25 now account for ~35% of sales
- **Results:** Went from “declining precipitously” ’14-’19 and ’19 US bankruptcy to +13% revenue growth ’22-’23



*"It isn't just walls and walls of jeans [anymore]. It really is moving this company to be...**a denim lifestyle retailer.**"*

— CEO, LEVI STRAUSS & CO.



- In the face of flat sales in 2023, Levi's increased its focus on product adjacencies that are well-aligned with its heritage (e.g., Denim Shirts)
- Also increased investment in direct-to-consumer and owned stores as part of renovation strategy

Results: +0.17% revenue growth '22-'23 boosted to +7.23% TTM '24-'25

Product & Pricing

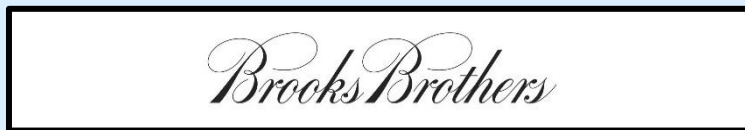
Brands must have the correct assortment to bring in an expanded, multigenerational consumer. It is key to protect your core—perhaps with some refinements to make it trend-right, but not with such drastic changes that it loses its heritage. At the same time, smartly moving into large and growing adjacent categories can help to revitalize your brand.

With a refreshed assortment in place, brands must review associated pricing strategy. Underperforming brands are often overly reliant on discounting; they must shift to providing enough value to warrant full price. Additionally, offering a range of price points can help to bring in new consumers.

Channel

Without the right distribution, targeting the right consumers with the right assortment at the right price is meaningless. Channel expansion is often necessary for brands that have been underperforming. Apparel brands are increasingly leaning into brand.com and retailer.com to reach consumers where they are; Amazon is no longer avoided or an afterthought.

Renovating brands can refine their physical presence in addition to doubling down on e-commerce. For Apparel brands that have their own stores, this can look like modernizing the shopper experience while leaning into heritage aesthetics and offering in-store exclusives to drive foot traffic.



BROOKS BROTHERS
Non-Iron Stretch Twill Solid Ainsley Spr
★★★★★ 3
\$128

Add to Cart



- Brooks Brothers is focusing on boosting store efficiency
- New stores are smaller and combine more modern design with heritage-focused memorabilia
- Some exclusives (e.g., Watanabe collab) only in-store
- Core parts of assortment are also available on Amazon
- **Results:** +4.7% visits per store Q4 '23-Q4 '24

Marketing

To tie it all together, renovating Apparel brands must effectively bring their brand to life. Having a strong heritage is a unique and enviable asset. It is important to lean into this story rather than overwriting it as part of the renovation process. Those that shift too far from their brand identity often face backlash based on perceptions of inauthenticity.

While not straying too far from core brand identity is usually the right move, leveraging new marketing channels and tactics is a worthy endeavor. Brands must meet consumers where they are, which requires exploring emerging platforms. Influencers and spokespeople can often help tell your brand story in a way that feels true to the old while simultaneously injecting excitement into the new.

UGG

*“Our main focus is to **bring our California lifestyle story to fruition**...No one person can do justice to all of the stories we want to tell. The UGG Collective features students, artists, surfers, photographers, musicians...**In telling their stories, we tell ours.**” – BRAND PRESIDENT, UGG*



- UGG has shifted its marketing strategy to increase relevance while staying true to its California roots and aesthetic
- Increased range of models and use of influencers and user generated content
- **Results:** Turned around revenue from -4.2% '15-'19 to +8.7% '19-'25

Conclusion

Renovation is often the key to returning to relevance and a strong growth trajectory for “legacy” Apparel brands. Those that are struggling to achieve desired revenues, facing consumer indifference, and being left behind by the competition require an objective and fact-based understanding of how to get their brand promise, consumer, product and pricing, channels, and marketing back on track.

Since 1981, Kaiser Associates has been widely recognized as the gold standard in fact-based strategy. Our team powerfully combines bespoke research with deep industry expertise to help Apparel brands build the knowledge base and strategy they need to turn around performance. Reach out to explore how we can help you in your brand renovation journey.



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