

Brand	Date	Publication	Headline
Van Heusen	29-04-2021	Afaqs.com	A chat with Van Heusen's Abhay Bahugune on remote working, formal dressing and production challenges

[A chat with Van Heusen's Abhay Bahugune on remote working, formal dressing and production challenges](#)

Van Heusen's chief operating officer talks in length about the newly launched sub-brand 'Denim Labs', and how fashion has changed in the WFH era.

Van Heusen, a 'power dressing' brand from the house of Aditya Birla Fashion and Retail (ABFRL), recently launched a new sub-brand 'Denim Labs'. Van Heusen Denim Labs ushers in a new age of denim, crafted for the modern-day professionals, who need to shift between work and play.

The brand has also launched a campaign, titled 'Move in the New Blue', featuring the face of the brand and Bollywood actress Jacqueline Fernandez. The ad will be featured across multiple mediums, such as television, print and digital.

Earlier this year, ABFRL had closed two strategic investments with leading fashion designers Sabyasachi Mukherjee and Tarun Tahiliani. The new line will target young working professionals, and is designed to provide comfort and freedom of movement.

Van Heusen has over 128 years of experience in the work wear category, and has expanded into categories such as lounge wear, sportswear, lingerie and innerwear, and accessories such as masks and more.

The new sub-brand stands for fashion and functionality, with each product offering created to provide the perfect blend of comfort, performance and ergonomics.

The Denim Labs collection will include shirts, trousers, jackets, blazers, etc., for both men and women. The denim pieces are available in different fits, such as skinny, slim and regular, in a selection of washes and finishes.

Conceptualised by Famous Innovations, it is Van Heusen's maiden campaign for the Denim Labs.

Abhay Bahugune, chief operating officer, Van Heusen, tells afaqs!, "We have recognised that the country's young consumers are seeking comfortable and functional denim wear. In modern workplaces, denim is becoming increasingly acceptable as formal wear."

Bahugune adds that the line was supposed to be launched in 2020, but owing to the first COVID-induced lockdown, the plans had to be delayed. He informs us that the work on this line resumed in October 2020 and, even then, the company was facing logistical challenges as India had yet to fully open up.

"Denim Labs was created to add a third dimension of casual wear to our existing collection. The COVID situation has only pushed our case further, in terms of the way consumer behaviours have changed. There is a momentum towards denim, and more towards casual wear in general. COVID has fast-tracked online shopping and consumption, and we felt that this is the right time to launch the line."

Bahugune explains that at this time, the consumer is transitioning towards a different way of dressing. The dress code for office wear itself is slowly evolving.

He admits that he doesn't know how the pandemic is going to pan out, or when life will return to normalcy, and acknowledges that even after the pandemic ends, a large chunk of people may continue to work from home.

"Keeping all these factors in mind, we designed the new collection, with comfort and style in mind."

He mentions that even if people are working from home, there are some who still like to wear formal clothes and dress in a professional manner.

"However, since professional dressing itself is evolving, maybe a person, who used to wear trousers, may opt for a more comfortable silhouette like chinos or joggers. T-shirt is another product that is seeing a strong uptick in consumption. It provides a level of comfort and is acceptable to be seen on Zoom calls, even during formal meetings."

When asked if people would opt for denim pieces in the upcoming summer season, Bahugune argues that denim, as a material, has evolved over the years and is no longer a heavy, constricting material.

"There is a tremendous versatility that denim has, as a product, and it is no longer a rigid, heavy, uncomfortable product."

Abhay Bahugune, Van Heusen

"There are many products in our line that we've created keeping in mind the feel and weight of the product. There is a tremendous versatility that denim has, as a product, and it is no longer a rigid, heavy, uncomfortable product."

The biggest challenge that he faced during the pandemic, especially in the context of the Denim Labs line, was product development.

"It became challenging, especially since we experienced a bottleneck from the supply chain point of view. Our design teams had to be present in the factories, where the product development happened. So, we had to take all the necessary precautions."

Van Heusen Denim Labs is currently available in 200-plus exclusive brand outlets, multi-brand retail and its official website. The collection will also be available across e-commerce platforms.

Talking about the new collection, Sourabh Mishra, a brand strategist, and managing partner and co-founder, Azendor Consulting (former CSO at TBWA India and Saatchi & Saatchi), believes that bringing in a collection like this is much needed, as there is a fatigue setting in for some people, who have been working from home for a while now.

"When people stay at home, there's a certain fatigue that comes with staying in your pyjamas all day long. Some people are trying to create a differentiation between the weekend and a workday, and clothing plays a role in that."

He adds that clothes have the power to put you in a particular frame of mind, and that it's important for people to create these markers. While working at office, he points out, there was a formal work structure that people had, but it can be more challenging to create that while working from home.

Opining on the ad itself, he calls it a little odd that Fernandez was the face of a collection that is aimed at both men and women; it could possibly be a little misleading for some people.