



# Convenience and Price Vs. Fashion and Quality

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**S**ignificant shifts have taken place in consumer motivation over the past 25 years. Consumers are even more mobile, more women are working, singles are more prevalent, and among other things, "Me and Mine" is more the focus. Combined with the dressing down of America, consumers have shifted from malls to more convenient venues. This does not mean that the mall is dead. Rather, it means that the consumer is simply not going to the mall as often, nor spending as much time when there.

Thousands of consumer surveys conducted by our firm 25 years ago show market differences from shopping surveys conducted today. Back then, when consumers were asked what their primary reasons were for selecting specific apparel retailers, *Fashion* and *Quality* were numbers one and two in responses. In some cases *Fashion* was first, while in other instances *Quality* was number one. These were followed by *Merchandise Selection* and either *Price/Value* or *Convenience*. Not any longer!

In today's consumer surveys, *Convenience* and *Price/Value* are normally numbers one and two. *Fashion* does not even rank in the top five responses. These responses are also a reflection of today's big-box phenomenon. The typical consumer is both time-pressed and somewhat financially squeezed, especially with the rising cost of gasoline, education, and health care. Soccer Mom's and Mom-Jocks hold full-time jobs, run the household, are

the family chauffeur, shop and compare on the Internet, are the family cell phone manager, and most of all, they are always in a hurry. Thus, *Convenience* and *Price/Value* have become more important than *Quality*, *Merchandise Selection*, or *Fashion*. This does not mean that they do not buy some fashion goods. Rather, they make a purchase related to their job or for a special event.

The consumer generally has traded down, substituting *Convenience* for *Quality*. One need only look at the number of stores and sales gains at Wal-Mart, Target, and Kohl's, and the fact that only five malls will be built in the United States this year. The consumer is voting with her and his dollars for the *Convenience* and *Price/Value* of big boxes.

*Fashion* is trying to make a comeback. You might say that it started with the resurrection of the Martini. However, most of the apparel items are "fashion casual" and do not meet the Paris, New York, or Rio de Janeiro level. I attended a major disease fundraiser recently and the invitation stated "Formal Attire." However, only a few people had on tuxedos and long dresses. The majority of the men had on suits and a tie or a mock turtleneck. Some of the women had on long dresses, but most did not. A few women were truly chic with long, sleek, elegant evening gowns. Most men and women at least wore dark colors. Two truly fashionable men had on black pants with a bright white T-shirts. Usage determines demand. So much for *Fashion*!