

RETAIL RELATIONSHIPS, REIGNITED

Angela Cavalca

MULTIBRAND STORES ARE CO-OPTING MONOBRAND STRATEGIES AND EXPLORING NEW KINDS OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH DESIGNERS.



So-Milano

"In times [of] selfie culture, it is becoming important to offer the consumers something exclusive," said Anita Tillmann, Managing Partner at **Premium** tradeshows, in a recent statement. The demand for individuality is high, yet the economy is so unstable that it's safer to buy into tried and tested labels. How does a retailer reconcile these two opposing needs?

Some stores find the answer in new forms of collaborations with established brands. These can take the form of capsule collections, complete store takeovers or even more unusual projects.

Italian fashion veterans Aldo Carpinteri (owner of **Stefania Mode** stores online and offline) and Giordano Ollari (founder of **O'** boutiques and a scout for **White** tradeshows) recently opened a new concept store in Milan, **So-Milano**. It is arguably a multi-brand, but an unusual one: it functions as a mono-brand at any given period of time, staging takeovers of the space by different labels, which, however, rotate quickly. The designers are free to set up the

space as they wish, turning the shop into an outlet for their universe. So-Milano's plan is to collaborate with eight labels a year. The first brand it hosted was **J.W. Anderson**. The designer personally picked the selection of items to be displayed, including limited editions, art objects and stationery originally created for his workshops in East London. The next brand in the line is **Victoria Beckham**. Ollari explains: "We want to share this dynamic space with selected brands telling original stories and presenting unique pieces, capsules or special editions."

In a bid to offer exclusive items, online retailer **Mr Porter** teamed up with another retailer – the revered Japanese store **Beams** – which picked out six up-and-coming Japanese brands to produce a series of exclusive capsule collections, each including 6-9 pieces, for mrporter.com. "It's all about offering our customer something that they can't find anywhere else," said Daniel Todd, buyer at Mr Porter. "We discussed how we could really play to the brands' strengths, to create something that was unique yet underpinned by a centralized theme."

Diversifying the offer while maintaining a strong brand identity was also the idea behind Zalando's collaboration with **Marni**. The Italian company created a limited footwear edition exclusively for the retailer, bringing to the table not only the unique **Marni** touch but also references to Zalando's best-sellers from other labels: **Dr. Martens**, **Reebok**, **Timberland** and **Vans**. At early stages, sales had already exceeded the company's targets.

Such collaborations have the combined benefits of a private label, inasmuch as they respond to the needs of a particular store's customers, and the credibility of the brands that create them. They allow for exclusive products, without the risk of investing in designers a retailer does not yet have a relationship with: a good option for an era where unprecedented customer demand for uniqueness meets extreme market volatility.