Fast Retailing unveils new Lifewear-based eco business strategy, reports Uniqlo sales

By Sandra Halliday - 2 December 2021

Fast Retailing announced on Thursday that it’s “advancing” its LifeWear concept and has “formulated Fiscal 2030 Targets and an Action Plan for core aspects of sustainability”.

And it added that “the entire Fast Retailing Group, based on the LifeWear concept, will accelerate its transition to a new business model encompassing both sustainability and business growth.”

The strategy is underpinned by ethics, diversity, inclusion, carbon-neutrality, zero waste, traceability and transparency.

It said that Lifewear is all about “everyday clothing, designed to make everyone's life better — to create apparel that not only emphasises quality, design, and price, but also meets the definition of ‘good clothing’ from the standpoint of the environment, people, and society”.

So what’s actually happening now? In conjunction with the objective of the Ariake Project (“to make and sell only
apparel that customers truly want”) that it launched with Google in 2017, it will “emphasise care for the environment in all processes, from manufacturing to transport and sales, sharply reducing greenhouse gas emissions and waste to establish a production process with a light environmental impact”.

At the same time, there will be a big focus on safeguarding human rights in all processes, “building a supply chain that allows customers to purchase products with trust”.

It will also develop new reuse and recycling services and technologies to extend the life and utility of LifeWear post-purchase. And it’s extending its worldwide initiatives for social contribution and diversity through the apparel business.

Fast Retailing Group Senior Executive Officer, Koji Yanai, said of all this: “Providing apparel that customers will cherish for a long time has been the aim of our business for many years. With environmental problems and other serious global issues becoming increasingly evident, we have further advanced our philosophy, and are pursuing measures to show the world a completely new way for clothes to be, while contributing to the realisation of a sustainable society.”

Practical targets include — among others — focusing on zero waste by reducing, replacing, re-using, and recycling materials used in the process of delivering clothes to customers; achieving carbon-neutrality by 2050; reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 90% by 2030; cutting store electricity consumption; and developing new highly energy-efficient store formats, with an aim to launch a prototype store during 2023.

It’s also aiming to increase the proportion of recycled materials to around 50% by 2030 and is expanding its introduction of materials that “place a lower burden on the environment, starting with synthetic fibres such as rayon and nylon”.

The new strategy runs throughout the group, but most consumers are likely to encounter it when they buy from its biggest brand, Uniqlo. And on the same day as the firm released the news, it also reported its Japanese Uniqlo monthly sales.

The operation saw sales falling again in November with a 4.6% comparable drop and a total sales fall of 5.1%. Both figures included online sales.

The company said that while its annual Uniqlo anniversary sale and sales of collaborative products proved strong, same-store sales declined after warmer-than-usual temperatures in the first half of the month stifled sales of cold-weather clothing.

The weather is a constant issue for the business as many of its simple basics are heavily dependent on the right kind of weather, be it sunshine in the summer or cool temperatures later in the year.

Customer numbers were above the average for the year to date in November, but the average purchase per customer lagged the rest of the year.

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