

Vintage Fashion Retailer

Business Opportunity Profile

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Introduction

Vintage fashion retailers source and hand-pick vintage clothing pieces which are at least 20 years old and sell them for a profit. They have experience of identifying, valuing and dating vintage clothing, including rare and icon pieces.

This profile provides information about starting up and trading as a vintage fashion retailer. It describes the skills required, the training available, the current market trends and the key trading issues.

Training and resources

Suitable resources and training courses for anyone starting up as a vintage fashion retailer include:

- History of Fashion and Style, which is an online course provided by the London College of Fashion. The four- or six-week course costs £380 and covers fashion history from the French Revolution to the 1990s. Go to www.arts.ac.uk/subjects/curation-and-culture/short-courses/art-history-and-criticism/history-of-fashion-and-style-online-short-course-lcf for details.
- Resources published by the Vintage Fashion Guild covering dating, assessing, buying and restoring vintage clothing and accessories. The resources are available at <https://vintagefashionguild.org/resources/buying-selling>.
- Online resources provided by bira, which cover topics such as digital and social media, store management, retail technology, payments and finance (<https://bira.co.uk/resources>).
- Fashion Buying and Merchandising, which is an online course provided by the London College of Fashion. The seven-week course costs £300 and covers buying techniques, trends and merchandising strategies. Go to www.arts.ac.uk/subjects/fashion-business/short-courses/fashion-retail/fashion-buying-and-merchandising-online-short-course-lcf for more information.
- Free videos and webinars provided by HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC), which cover topics such as self-assessment, Making Tax Digital, VAT, self-employment and becoming an employer. Go to www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmrc-webinars-email-alerts-and-videos for further information.

Key market issues and trends

Current market issues affecting both start-up and established vintage fashion retailers include the following:

- In 2024, sales of vintage trench coats increased by 429% year-on-year, while sales of vintage leather jackets increased by 191%. Sales of vintage silver accessories also increased, by 243% (www.fashioncapital.co.uk/insights/vintage-fashion-takes-over-latest-data-reveals).
- In 2023, the vintage jewellery market grew at a faster rate than the overall jewellery market. The growth was driven by consumers looking for rare and 'icon' pieces (www.ft.com/content/ea2fbd1b-a6df-40e4-82bb-c6dbbbf22c40).
- The fashion resale market grew 15 times faster in 2023 than the broader retail clothing sector due to an increase in eco-conscious and style-savvy consumers. It was predicted that vintage and second-hand clothing sales would account for 10% of global fashion sales in 2025 (<https://mccs-journalism.gold.ac.uk/wp/snatch/the-vintage-boom-how-secondhand-fashion-is-taking-over-the-global-market>).
- In 2025, many second-hand and vintage marketplaces launched authentication services for high-end and luxury goods due to an increase in counterfeit and fake goods being sold online. This follows a 2024 survey by Citizen's Advice, which revealed a 30% rise in complaints about counterfeit goods being sold online (www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cg41qpykg0no).

Trading, commercial and legal issues

Start-up and established vintage fashion retailers face the following trading, commercial and legal issues:

The Vintage Fashion Guild

The Vintage Fashion Guild (<https://vintagefashionguild.org>) is a membership organisation set up to preserve and promote vintage fashion. Vintage fashion retailers who have at least one year's selling experience can join the guild as a trade member. Members benefit from a listing in an online members directory, the opportunity to participate in trade-only discussion forums and access to resources. The annual membership fee is \$35 (around £27).

Trade members of the Vintage Fashion Guild must comply with a Code of Practice, which requires them to:

- Provide clear and accurate descriptions for every item they have for sale, along with accurate written measurements.
- Have policies covering terms of sale, returns and refunds.
- Provide photographs for each item for sale, which shows any labels or makers' marks and any flaws in the item.

Go to <https://vintagefashionguild.org/join/vfg-code-of-practice> to view the code.

Vintage fairs

Vintage fashion retailers typically buy and sell clothing and accessories at vintage fairs, which are held across the UK. Examples include:

- Frock Me! Vintage Fashion Fair (www.frockmevintagefashion.com), which is held every four to five weeks in London.
- Clerkenwell Vintage Fashion Fair, which is held in Bloomsbury, London several times each year (<https://clerkenwellvintagefashionfair.co.uk/upcoming-fairs>).
- Judy's Vintage Fair and Lou Lou's Vintage Fair, which are held regularly in towns and cities across the UK (<https://judysvintagefair.com/judys-vintage-fair/>, www.loulousvintagefair.com).

Specialist wholesalers

Some retailers also source vintage clothing from specialist wholesalers. Retailers can buy individual garments or kilo bundles.

Examples of wholesalers include:

- Glass Onion (<https://glass-onion.com/pages/wholesale>).
- The Vintage Wholesale Company (<https://thevintagewholesalecompany.com>).
- VintageWholesale (www.vintagewholesale.co.uk).

Online marketplaces

Many vintage fashion retailers buy and sell garments via specialist marketplaces. Examples include:

- Discover Vintage Interiors (www.discovervintage.co.uk/collections/clothes).
- ThredUp (www.thredup.com).
- Depop (www.depop.com/gb/).
- Etsy (www.etsy.com/uk/market/vintage).

Clothing labels

Vintage clothing is not subject to the current labelling rules that require clothing made from hair or fur, including cashmere, angora and wool, to be clearly labelled. The Vintage Fashion Guild has published a guide to identifying different types of fur, animal skins and plumage at <https://vintagefashionguild.org/resources/fur-exotic-skin>.

The guild also maintains a guide to some of the main vintage labels at <https://vintagefashionguild.org/resources/labels>.

Second-hand dealer's licence

Vintage fashion retailers will need to check with their local authority to see whether they need to be licensed or registered as a second-hand dealer. The situation varies depending on where in the UK the retailer is based.

VAT

Vintage fashion is standard-rated for VAT, and retailers must register for VAT once their turnover reaches the mandatory threshold. Go to www.gov.uk/guidance/rates-of-vat-on-different-goods-and-services for more information about VAT rates.

It may be possible to account for VAT under a margin scheme, which allows a retailer to account for VAT only on the difference between the purchase price and the sale price (the margin). Go to www.gov.uk/vat-margin-schemes for more information about VAT margin schemes.

Consumer and business protection legislation

Under the Consumer Rights Act 2015, items supplied by a vintage fashion retailer must be of satisfactory quality and match its description. Under the Act, 'satisfactory quality', does not mean that garments must be in perfect condition, provided the description of the garment is accurate.

Under the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024, it is an offence for a vintage fashion retailer to mislead or provide false information to consumers about the garments they are selling. For example, a retailer must not mislead consumers about the authenticity or date of garments.

The Business Protection from Misleading Marketing Regulations 2008 make it an offence for vintage fashion retailers to make unfair comparisons with other retailers.

Insurance

A vintage fashion retailer requires several types of insurance cover, including:

- Public and product liability insurance, which covers the retailer against claims for compensation from anyone injured or adversely affected as a result of their activities.
- Employers' liability insurance, which is mandatory as soon as the vintage fashion retailer employs anyone.
- Legal expenses insurance, which provides cover for defending disputes with customers, marketplaces, vintage fairs, wholesalers and landlords or to defend employment tribunal cases.
- Contents insurance, which provides cover for vintage clothing and accessories against accidental damage or theft.
- Commercial vehicle insurance to cover 'carriage of own goods', which includes personal possessions, along with any garments stored in the vehicle.

Specialist insurance for fashion retailers is available from insurers and brokers such as Falcon Insurance (www.falconinsurance.co.uk/second-hand-goods-shop-insurance) and AXA (www.axa.co.uk/business-insurance/clothes-shop-insurance).

Related factsheets

SEC021 Fashion Retail - Sector Update

SYN005 Fashion Retail - Industry Snapshot

BOP272 Designer Fashion Boutique

MBP466 Menswear Retail

MBP484 Women's Fashion Retail

MBP485 Childrenswear Retail

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