

Tale of 2 trends

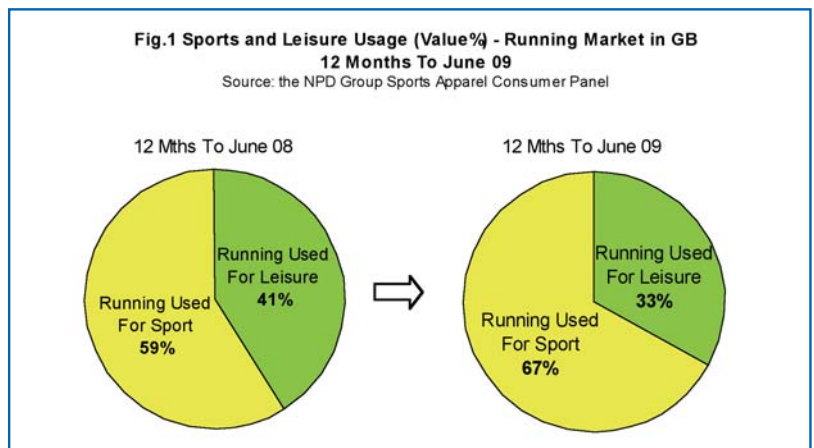
Sales of running apparel have overtaken footwear, according to The NPD Group

British consumers spent £404million on running footwear and apparel in the 12 months to June 2009, a decline compared to the previous year, according to NPD's Online Consumer Data.

Retailers struggled to sell running footwear much more than they did running apparel. The running footwear market declined by six per cent and drove the overall market down, whereas the apparel market grew by five per cent in the 12 months to June 2009, compared to the 12 months to June 2008.

Decline

How can these two trends be explained? Despite the efforts to stimulate the market, the running footwear sector declined fairly strongly.





Sales of discounted running shoes grew, but this growth was not sufficient to compensate the strong decline in full-price running footwear. In apparel, the proportion of reduced and non-reduced sales remained equal in the 12 months to June 2009 - and both sectors saw increases.

So why are sales of full-price running shoes declining when sales of full-price running apparel is increasing?

Whether on promotion or not, running shoes are sold at a much higher price than running apparel. The average price difference in the overall market between running



shoes and apparel is around £20; this difference is even more important if we compare full-price running shoes to full-price apparel. Currently, a technical running shoe is a lot less attractive to a consumer than a new top at a much lower price, whether in a sale or not.

Nevertheless, when consumers were asked: "What factor most influenced your purchase" in the NPD Online Consumer questionnaire, none of the answers related to price appear in the top three reasons cited by consumers of running footwear or apparel.

The top three factors that influenced their purchase decisions were 'fit', 'quality of the product' and the fact that the 'product looks good'. What is noticeable is that product quality is currently much more important to consumers - this reason to purchase did not appear in the top three answers when the same survey was conducted for the 12 months to June 2008.

Purchasing patterns

Understanding how consumers purchase on the basis of price only would not be right, even in the current economic climate. Different parameters have to be taken into account.

In the case of the running market, there has been a significant

change in how consumers intend to use their running shoes or apparel. Consumers intending to use their running shoes and apparel for sports increased respectively by nine per cent and 21 per cent in the 12 months to June 2009 compared to the previous year, whereas those who intend to use their running shoes and apparel for leisure showed a decrease in value sales of 21 per cent and nine per cent respectively.

How can the difference between sports and leisure usage be explained? On one hand, it seems that people who bought new running shoes or apparel did so because they considered their purchase as a necessity for their sporting activities. On the other, it seems that potential buyers of running items for leisure purposes considered these purchases as non-essential and they could carry on using the ones they already own. The price was apparently a factor that dissuaded them from buying, since the decline in sales of running shoes used for leisure was much deeper than the drop in sales of running apparel used for leisure. **SI**

The NPD Group monitors the sales of sports footwear and sports apparel in many countries around the world. For more information contact The NPD Group sports team on 01932 355580.