An element of mystery always surrounds trend forecasts, but in this article we examine the process in a little more detail.

The colour circle



Eurojersey's head of design, Nello Marelli, predicts natural themes will dominate the beach and swimwear sectors this year.

Speedo

Big fashion brands build up to the launch of a new season's collection the way film studios prepare for a big premiere: they want to get the critics and the public talking and generate extra business from positive column centimetres and word of mouth.

It used to be that we needed different kinds of clothing for the different seasons of the year, but in these days of central heating and air-conditioning, this is less true than before. The need to show something new is about bringing buyers back into stores long before the clothes you sold them last time have worn out; it's about exciting their imaginations enough to convince them to buy again.

In preparing for new seasons, clothing brands like to receive some assurances that the route they are planning to go down is the right one. But what is right and what is wrong in the world of fashion? Who decides?

Far in advance of any of the big launches, trends experts meet to discuss the way things are going and to decide what colours, what effects, what themes are going to be in fashion for future seasons. Nello Marelli, whose day-job is head of design at Italian fabric manufacturer Eurojersey, is a member of this exclusive and mysterious club. He sits on the committee that decides on European trends for swimwear and intimate apparel and describes the act of stipulating a new trend as a bet for the future, a gamble that the clothes and footwear designs you put together will strike the right note with buyers.

He explains: "There are different people creating trends. Some are really connected to the market and are people many in the business feel sure they can trust. Others involved in this seem just to think. Both are important. The responsibility of trends committees is to pay attention to all of this and decide where to put our confidence."



Delayed reaction. Crowds at Première Vision in February 2009 flock to see what the trends experts have come up with for sports apparel for spring-summer 2010.

Première Vision

But he points out that there is responsibility on both sides if his company, or any fabric manufacturer, decides to "build a new trend" for, say, swimwear, and asks the wrong person. Trends consultants are merely trying to tell a story about colours and so on. Sometimes the stories turn out to be correct, and sometimes not, but he says both sides have to be clever; both have responsibilities.

Naturally, with his credentials, he counts himself among the ranks of the storytellers. When the world suffers a big shock, he puts, in his own phrase, his antennae up and pays close attention to how people react, to what appears in newspapers and in films. There are rules, he insists, and when a community responds to events in society, it tends to follow the rules. Knowledge of the language of colour and the language of design helps the observer interpret the response.

"I push for certain colours, and often my colleagues say yes, but that's because I have some authority. I observe a lot. If you attend a performance at the theatre or a film in the cinema, the first impression is very important, but it's entire, it includes sound and colour together. Maybe only the next day will you remember another message at another level, and if you take more time, you can start to think about that message, the moral. To present a trend is exactly the same, but when it comes to the presentation, a few sentences have to explain a lot. We have to create a simple synthesis of a lot of messages."

When he presents his findings, he explains that it's also necessary to bear in mind the differences that exist between one country and another, and between brands. "I can't go into Victoria's Secret, Marks & Spencer and Speedo with exactly the same presentation," he continues. "I have to prepare something that shows I know and respect each of them. Then, in each case, we work and think together to prepare the best story for the consumer. It's best to take a little time to do this, although people, including designers, want immediate results these days."

It's another example of the partnership approach that abounds in every industry; successful players these days work collaboratively with their supply chain partners. If it works for sourcing buttons, it can work for agreeing trend directions too. And according to Nello Marelli it not only works, it makes a huge difference.

Colour-specifics

Eurojersey's head of design, Nello Marelli, has lots to say about the colours that come in and out of fashion, with beachwear and swimwear his specialist subjects in the world of sports and outdoor.

Pink has been a bestseller for the last five years, but the market is now becoming bored with that colour, he says. Now browns are big because of the popularity of natural themes and our concern for and love of the earth.

Greens are also in vogue. "But green is difficult," according to the Eurojersey expert. "There used to be a lot of green in schools and hospitals and clinics, so the associations are not always happy. It's the same with yellow. People who were mentally ill used to be made to wear yellow, so there is a deep-seated psychological reaction to yellow. It's also on warning signs, to alert us to electricity or toxic substances; it means danger. All these messages are there, even if we are not immediately conscious of them."