

Second-Hand Fashion

Amy Wyke, a successful second-hand clothes retailer, talks about the evolution of this industry.

Amy had told me that she mostly wore purely second-hand outfits these days, so when I first saw her in her sharp, red blazer and pleated skirt, I assumed this was one of the rare days when she'd decided to dress in brand-new clothes. Surely, if they were second-hand, the red would be faded, and the jacket would have lost its shape. However, Amy assured me that they were not. She admits, though, that she would ordinarily wear something far more comfortable and scruffy.

Asked whether she'd always been a fan of dressing second-hand, Amy said, 'As teenagers, we'd make fun of the kids who wore used clothes. It was a sign that you couldn't afford new things, and no one wanted to admit to coming from a poor family. Whenever my mum came home with something for me, I'd refuse to wear it, even if it looked quite trendy. I was convinced that someone would somehow know where it had come from. It might have belonged to one of my friend's siblings for all I knew!

'It's completely different now,' Amy continues. 'Teens these days will happily admit to wearing second-hand clothes. The fact that they are affordable is a benefit, but it's not their main motivation. After all, plenty of stores offer cheap, mass-produced clothes. Even with many high street shops closing, you can buy them online, and despite what is often said, these clothes can be well-designed and long-lasting. But there lies the problem. They produce mountains of polluting waste, and young people want to do their bit to prevent that.'

Now, Amy is one of many new entrepreneurs making the most of the trend in second-hand clothing. It's not all plain sailing, though. As Amy says, 'With so many competitors, you've got to find your edge. Some sellers specialise in designer labels, for example, or clothing from a particular era. Of course, you have the problem of sourcing the right clothes for your brand. Trends change as well, which could turn around and bite you. Selling a bit of everything, as I do, means I'm not putting all my eggs in one basket, but it means I have to find other ways to attract customers'.

'I've learned important lessons in my work, especially regarding money. I struggled working alone and earning a pittance for ages, thinking it was more cost-effective than taking on staff. I'm so glad I'm not doing that now, as I'm bringing in far more even while paying out for two people's wages. It's the same with the website. The one I designed was decent enough, but it has really paid off since I took the plunge and paid professionals to improve the design. It doesn't come easily to me, as I'm not naturally a spendthrift.'

I asked Amy her thoughts about the future of second-hand clothing. After all, a growing industry in second-hand clothes could hurt the industries that produce new clothes, so potentially, once all our second-hand ones are worn out, we might run out of clothes. Amy is more optimistic, however. 'The second-hand clothing market has brought in a new interest in adapting and redesigning old clothes or making them from scratch. That's something that really died out in the era of chain stores. So, in future, I think I'll be stocking more of those kinds of clothes, which is great.'