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**GIMME MORE**  
The sales this time have been much bigger and the merchandise on display much better

would mind! I picked up two pairs of shoes from Soley something I normally wouldn't have done. The sales this time have been much bigger and the merchandise on display much better."

**THE GENUINE ARTICLE**

Which brings us to a point that is endlessly disputed by consumers like us and store owners and brand managers – the 'genuine' sale.

For years, pre-liberalisation, when shopkeepers offered sales, there were 10 per cent discounts. Then the retail market began to get competitive and we were offered discounts 'up to 20 per cent.' 'Discounts up to 30 per cent' are now almost the norm, but we yearned for the great end-of-season sales that take place in Europe, the US and other shopping-friendly havens and allow people to buy a great variety of things at a fraction of the original price.

Our sales are not 'genuine' sales, we have always maintained. Because the really meaningful discounts in 'up to 30 per cent' sales are always on products few people would want anyway, and in any case, the sales never offer a good variety.

But this year, again, has been different.

This year, we're all willing to concede, the sales have been 'genuine'.

"A market is generally divided in categories," explains Arvind Singhal, chairman of

**ALDO**

Maroon suede preptoe in matt finish with slim heels

Actual price Rs 6,000

Sale price

**4,000**



**On Sale**

**MANGO**  
Blue satin shirt with a hand made bow  
Actual price Rs 1,990  
Sale price  
**1,390**



**FIGHT CLUB**

Other experts, however, see a bigger picture. Fast growing market competition and consumer awareness, they feel, are the key factors behind this year's unprecedented shopping boom. Aside from the fashion brands' need to move stock in a time of economic slowdown, this year also saw the entry and consolidation of a number of new big brands – all of whom are competing for our

custom.

Technopak, a general management consultancy. "The first category includes those who buy whatever is branded and do not care much about the pricing. The second category includes those who aspire to buy brands but would not like to spend a huge amount."

He continues: "The brands cater first to the brand-conscious who pick the best of the lot in good numbers. So what's left for the sales is generally leftover stock. But this year, even the fashion conscious didn't buy much, so the junta had a great variety to choose from in the sales."

Brands of course insist that their sales have always been 'genuine'. The only difference this time, they say, was the length of time the sales continued. "For our brands like Mango, Promod, Charles & Keith and the rest, the sales are as per guidelines given by brand internationalists," insists Kamal Kotak, director, Major Brands. "They are genuine and the discounts given are the same year after year. Only the time span of the sale may differ depending on the market conditions."

And that time span, say brand managers and store owners, lengthened simply due to a slow start in the sale period. "Buyers were apprehensive, so the foot falls were low," says Pranay Sinha of Star Centres. "And that led to an ongoing sale period. I guess the number of brands on sale and the long sale period made the scenario more audible. The 'genuineness' of the sales though remained more or less the same."

"Naturally then, they have to make an impact," says Arvind Singhal of Technopak. "A market that was essentially limited to about some five brands with 10 retail outlets across country was suddenly inundated with a huge number of big brands. And all need to survive. So introducing their products at lower than usual costs was a great competing strategy."

Yogesh Tiwari, general manager, sales and marketing, Blackberry, agrees. "The fact also is that buyers are no longer satisfied with 'up to 10 per cent' discounts," he says. "This has added to brand woes. Shoppers now want proper value for their money and know how to get it."

So when it came to sales, competing brands tried all sorts of strategies, including beginning their sales a few days apart. "One brand would start a few days before or after another competing brand. And it would give a further discount. A perfect strategy to pull customers to their store," says Pranay Sinha.

So for buyers, options increased as did dis-

**"SHOPPERS NOW WANT PROPER VALUE FOR MONEY AND KNOW HOW TO GET IT"**