

Dresses, Lower-Priced Lines Lead Way in Chicago

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CHICAGO — Midwest retailers sought immediate dresses and fall sweaters at the three-day Chicago Women's and Children's Apparel Market that ended June 8 at the Apparel Center.

But they shopped fewer showrooms. Tracy Buttron, vice president with Karin Berger Ltd., said a smaller number of retailers want to spend the time or money visiting showrooms. "It's become a road market because [buyers] know we'll come," Buttron said, adding "everyone is still penny-pinching."

After the market, Buttron planned to travel to Minneapolis, Sioux Falls, S.D., and Omaha before hitting Des Moines, Iowa City and the Quad Cities region in Iowa and Illinois.

Susan McCullough, senior vice president for apparel for Merchandise Mart Properties Inc., said showroom owners reported a fair number of appointments, adding that June market is not one of the busiest. McCullough attributed the declining number of showrooms to two main factors: the troubled economy and the preference of buyers to attend the women's apparel trade show Stylemax, which is held four times annually at the city's Merchandise Mart.

"A lot of the showrooms have been downsizing because of Stylemax," she said.

Donna West, buyer for Chicago specialty store Londo Mondo, said business has recently improved and the June market proved valuable for buying immediate dresses and tops. "I was very happy with what I found," she said. "The (sales) reps who are there have good product."

West ordered off-the-shoulder black and gray tunics and body-hugging jersey dresses from Julian Chang, retro-print silk and linen dresses from Burlapp and beaded and embroidered dresses for fall from Theme.

"What we haven't seen is bottoms," she said. "This summer the go-to thing is a dress, or a tunic and leggings, rather than jeans."

West, who placed immediate, fall and holiday orders for Londo Mondo's two city locations, said she is buying closer to season to accommodate her "buy-now, wear-now customer."

For fall, West also liked chunky cable-knit sweaters in black, gray, brown and ivory by M. Rena, ruched jersey stretch tops from Lola & Sophie and wrap cardigans and striped sweaters from Theme.

Oats, a lower-priced cashmere line, and Lola & Sophia, a lower-priced collection of women's tops owned by Gender Bias, were among the lines that were moving well.

Sarah Scott, owner of Valentina, a specialty store in suburban Winnetka, Ill., came to the June market looking for jewelry, fashions with military styling and comfortable T-shirts.

The store carries party dresses and apparel from Splendid, Ella Moss and LA Made for clients ranging from teenagers to fashionable moms, and Scott ended up finding recession-friendly, lower-priced cashmere from Oats, ordering dolman sleeve, zip hoodies and ruffled cardigans.