

BIG BEAT BOUTIQUE

Suzanne Egleton ● head of UK marketing ● Ben Sherman

The fashion industry is notoriously self-conscious, so it would have been disappointing if Suzanne Egleton, head of marketing at Ben Sherman, didn't have an air of the diva about her. She's poised, polished and determined to make sure *P&I's* photographer catches her best side as she prepares to tell all about her brand's latest zeitgeist-surfing promotional push.

Egleton has set herself the task of establishing Ben Sherman as an all-round lifestyle brand, elevating its status as iconic shirt-maker. While it has already expanded, adding everything from wallets to spectacles, it's still the shirts that spring to mind. It's vital for Egleton that this push achieves her aims – as well as backing Ben Sherman's spring/summer "Big Beat" collection, it comes at a time when owner Oxford Industries (which acquired the fashion house in 2004) looks to take the Ben Sherman retail operation from two UK stores to 18 by 2009 and opens its first US store in New York this month.

Egleton may have big plans for extending awareness, but she's certainly not taking the brand out of its comfort zone. The core market of 18- to 34-year-olds is being targeted, and she's leveraging the mod musical heritage Ben Sherman has become synonymous with to achieve it, albeit with a modern twist. So, a three-month pan-European link-up with Warner Music sees a gift-with-purchase deal on all products, offering a ska compilation remixed by the Dub Pistols. In stores, POP will draw on black and white mod-type imagery and the band's website will feature a ska jukebox to back the campaign.

Egleton is convinced the project will bring her the strategic success she's after. "We are considering making a series of albums, which will really give us credibility in the music arena and link extremely well into our heritage. This is a natural fit and a partnership with longevity," she says.

Brand advocates are just as important. Egleton has identified the latest incarnation of the mod theme that

has boosted Ben Sherman over the past four decades, in bands such as Kaiser Chiefs, The Ordinary Boys and The Streets Mike Skinner, all of which are currently being supplied with clothes. Exposure on *Celebrity Big Brother* via The Ordinary Boys' Preston didn't do any harm either. According to Egleton, the singer almost exclusively wore Ben Sherman during his stay, promotion she sees as vital. "We have to make sure we are dressing the best celebrities in the music arena."

In an effort to extend brand association beyond music (and presumably the boom and bust trends that go with pop), footballer Rio Ferdinand will promote the brand's World Cup range later this year. "It gives us the kind of exposure in sport necessary to keep reaching our target market," she explains.

Her CV reveals a solid techie background, but while she says she was always happy, as a self-confessed fashion junkie, Egleton is now in her dream job. "I have enjoyed every job, but they were steps to where I am now." Kitted out in the latest Ben Sherman gear, she says wearing the brand is one of the perks of the job.

If the world of fashion is known for its pretentiousness, Egleton is not afraid to flag up her back-to-basics marketing beliefs. She admits it is cheesy, but credits her time at Microsoft as being responsible for her most important marketing lesson, the corporate mantra: "Failure to plan is planning to fail".

Egleton describes herself as driven and determined and comes across as genuinely passionate about her role. She is also honest about the image her brand has had at times – namely periods when it became the preserve of skin-heads and, latterly, chavs – but she's bullish in her defence of it. "You can't always be cool. Ben Sherman is a mainstream brand, but it's still credible. It has a very British feel and has been big in each decade since its launch in 1963. From the original mods to the Britpop acts, Ben Sherman has always been there."

Looking ahead, she's certain she has got it right: "This is our time and the prospects are looking extremely good."

Gemma O'Reilly



QUESTIONNAIRE

If you won the lottery...

I wouldn't tell anyone until I knew what I wanted to do. Then I'd give some to friends and family and invest the rest. I'm too business-minded.

Brand I most admire...

Fashion: Diesel, Agent Provocateur and Top Shop. Non fashion: Apple, Virgin.

Most embarrassing moment...

At my first post-grad job, I had a meeting with a supplier and was trying to impress. The meeting was tense and suddenly kicked off when one man stood up shouting. He knocked his chair over, the light above him fell on his head and I sat there bewildered not knowing what to do.

If I wasn't in marketing I would... run my own business

CURRICULUM VITAE

April 2005 to present

Head of marketing, Ben Sherman

2003-2005

Retail marketing manager, Euro Partnerships, Sega

2000-2003

Retail marketing manager/Windows XP marketing manager, Microsoft

1998-2000

Business development manager, Euro Partnerships, CompuServe/ AOL