

# Highflying markets make good

Mainland merchandising provides exceptional opportunities



by Jacky Wong

**C**areer prospects for merchandising professionals continue to be bright in the current economic situation, with more and more jobs available in the market.

Jessica Chan, manager, Junsun & Co Personnel Consultants says both new graduates and veteran merchandising professionals enjoy opportunities in the vibrant market, and conditions are especially good for the latter. Professionals who have accumulated a certain amount of work experience, coupled with good qualifications, are always sought after, and employers are offering better remuneration packages and promotion opportunities for career advancement. Junsun & Co's latest

data on job offerings show more than 50 per cent of offers are for merchandising professionals and around 70 per cent of these are for middle or senior management staff.

## Options for all comers

Among the various sectors, there are more job opportunities for merchandisers in the garment industry than in other industries like electronics and toys. Ms Chan says demand for merchandising professionals in the garment industry is always high, especially for the experienced, because of its long history of development in the territory.

She says employers prefer recruiting graduates from textile and clothing studies programmes at the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education and the Hong Kong

Polytechnic University. However, those who study marketing and business administration and can demonstrate good fashion sense, an outgoing personality, and good interpersonal and communication skills are also considered.

"Production of apparel products is complicated and involves numerous parties," Ms Chan says. "Merchandisers usually act as a coordinator for clients, manufacturers and suppliers, monitoring and supervising the production process and ensuring products adhere to clients' requirements. So, possessing very good communication skills and a pleasant character is essential."

In the garment industry, the jobs that are advertised are mainly as merchandisers. However, according to Ms Chan, different merchandising positions can be

found in other industries, especially for people with specialised skills. "Companies in areas like electronics usually require merchandising professionals to possess electronic engineering backgrounds and specific qualifications. So they recruit people as project engineers rather than merchandisers and give them other responsibilities in addition to merchandising," she says.

Since the industry is fast-paced and dynamic in nature, Ms Chan says companies always look for people who are flexible and have good problem-solving skills to handle ad hoc issues and meet the demands of clients and parties involved.

## Progressive career

Ms Chan believes merchandising is an exciting profession which offers many opportunities and a progressive career path for people who can commit to the job. Someone who joins the profession after secondary school typically works as a merchandising clerk for a few years and then promotions follow the regular path of merchandiser, senior merchandiser and manager, who leads a team in a specific product line.

Merchandisers have diverse responsibilities. For example, a junior merchandiser handles routine and administrative tasks such as client servicing, purchasing materials, and supervising and monitoring different production processes. He or she also prepares documents, checks colours, cuts swatches and follows up the delivery of samples. A senior merchandiser or manager handles orders, sources products and negotiates with customers about delivery schedules and the choice of designs. It is also necessary to develop new products and markets and ensure high standards of quality control. He or she is expected to check factories, liaise with customers, make overseas trips and negotiate prices.

With more companies gradually shifting their offices and factories to mainland China, many job opportunities can be found there. Junsun & Co's latest figures show that around 20 per cent of jobs in merchandising are stationed on the mainland, particularly in Shenzhen, Ningbo, Shanghai, Dongguan and Nanjing, where factories for the garment industry are centralised. To

attract Hong Kong people to work in these locations, most companies offer improved employee benefits and remuneration packages.

For those interested in the profession, Ms Chan advises giving serious consideration to whether or not they can handle the inevitable pressure. They should prepare themselves to work long hours and be flexible enough to handle multiple tasks and heavy workloads.

Although merchandising is a tough job, it is an industry which broadens personal experience and networks, and career prospects are always bright for high-flyers, making it popular with school leavers, Ms Chan concludes. **CT**

## UPBEAT PROFESSION

- Prospects remain bright for both new recruits and veteran merchandisers
- Middle management staff in high demand
- Relevant qualifications, an outgoing personality and good communication skills valued
- Ample opportunities in mainland China

## Salary table

Merchandising manager	40K+
Senior merchandiser	15-25K
Assistant merchandiser	10-15K
Merchandising clerk	7-8K

Figures are for reference only. To