



**Fashion business in an era of instability: how to choose today what will be the best tomorrow**

Fashion retail experts and practitioners discussed business development opportunities, sales growth and prospects for development in the near future, which is characterized as a period of instability. The participants of the business conference of the International Fashion Exhibition Central Asia Fashion discussed which segments will be the most promising in the future, whether it is possible to increase the profitability of the retail business in a period of uncertainty, as well as what to keep the focus of the fashion business and how to remain resilient to all changes in the world. Experts agreed that in order to survive, retailers need to adapt as much as possible to constantly and rapidly changing conditions.



Participants of the panel discussion of the CAF business Conference (from left to right): Meruert Toleubekova, Ksenia Kuserbayeva, Aliya Akhmetova, Maria Peterson, Milena Ershova

**How to plan an assortment based on global trends**

Thus, the speaker of the CAF business conference, co-founder, CEO, business coach of Retail Academy – Ksenia Kuserbayeva noted that retail is in stable turbulence all the time: *“Recently may have added a little more swings, but in fact retail is an industry where we are constantly in dynamics and making decisions. It is clear that the world is becoming more complicated and something is constantly happening. And we in business are faced with the fact that it is impossible to predict and measure something. This is the first thing that characterizes today’s time. And if quite recently, about six years ago, we counted a lot, analyzed and had the opportunity to make forecasts, now it is very*

*difficult to do this. Now, given the fact that it is unknown what tomorrow will bring, we are forced to analyze more often, faster, and more. And if earlier a business could afford not to count or measure some things, today analytics is becoming one of the first tools. This is exactly the survival strategy that many fashion industry stores have now: we face a colossal number of challenges every day. We face a colossal number of challenges every day. I have two retail chains myself, and we call our meetings sales headquarters, because this is exactly a military event where a new and new offensive is being worked out every day.*

*The next thing that characterizes our era of instability is the availability of information. But, due to the fact that there is too much of it, we do not understand how to work with it and the flow of information is sometimes more of a limitation and hinders. The speed of change is such that it is difficult to "catch" some trends, trace the relationships and make management decisions".*

The expert recommended that store owners work more actively and as flexibly as possible with the assortment: plan every day, pay attention to quick analytics, best-selling models in order to make product turnover and refund faster.

The colleague was also supported by an expert of the CAF business conference, a fashion retail practitioner, ex-buyer of Almeo Group, Saks Fifth Avenue, author of fashion courses, co-owner of The.Simple.kz – Evgeniya Ukasova: *"Today, trends are changing very quickly, and the winner is the one who reacts and interacts with the consumer in time. On the one hand, we are talking about the need to reduce the time of arrival of collections, and on the other about the selection of sizes. However, in Turkey it will be necessary to buy the line and so far in no other way. If the order is from China, you can choose, but the goods sometimes go for more than six months. Now it has become a little better, but, nevertheless, the issue of planning purchases at the beginning of the season and the assortment matrix is acute. Turn around to other markets: there are great Kazakhstani brands, there is excellent production in Kyrgyzstan and in general in the CIS countries".*



The speaker of the panel discussion of the CAF business conference is Evgenia Ukasova, ex-buyer of Saks Fifth Avenue and Almeo Group, author of fashion courses, co-owner of the brand The.Simple.kz (Kazakhstan, Almaty)

At the same time, Aliya Akhmetova, entrepreneur, founder of the Kazakh clothing brand Heybaby, shared her own experience and vision of the situation: *"I have only been selling clothes for the last 6 years and we have a different business model. We started with production in Kazakhstan: we did not buy the finished product, but began to produce it. Before the pandemic, they realized that such a business model is very long and therefore switched to a*

*mixed one. Now we are more called a fashion product company when we are fully responsible for the development of the collection, for the patterns, for the prototype. We carry out part of the order ourselves, at our own facilities, and send part to factories in Turkey or China. This business model seemed great to us until the pandemic hit and the logistics chains fell apart. We reassembled them, it seems like we started living in a new way, but again everything fell apart. And here I would like to draw such an analogy with the human body. When you are athletic, active, disciplined, and you have no excess fat, it is much easier for you to move in an era of change. And this is what we are striving for now as a company – we dry ourselves: we become proactive, we dump excess, we confer much more often. We analyze a lot of indicators that have not been analyzed before, we implement marketing without a budget. The question is in focus, in discipline, in purpose. And when all this comes together, it turns out that it is also possible to live in an era of instability and change”, – said Aliya Akhmetova, speaker of the CAF business conference.*

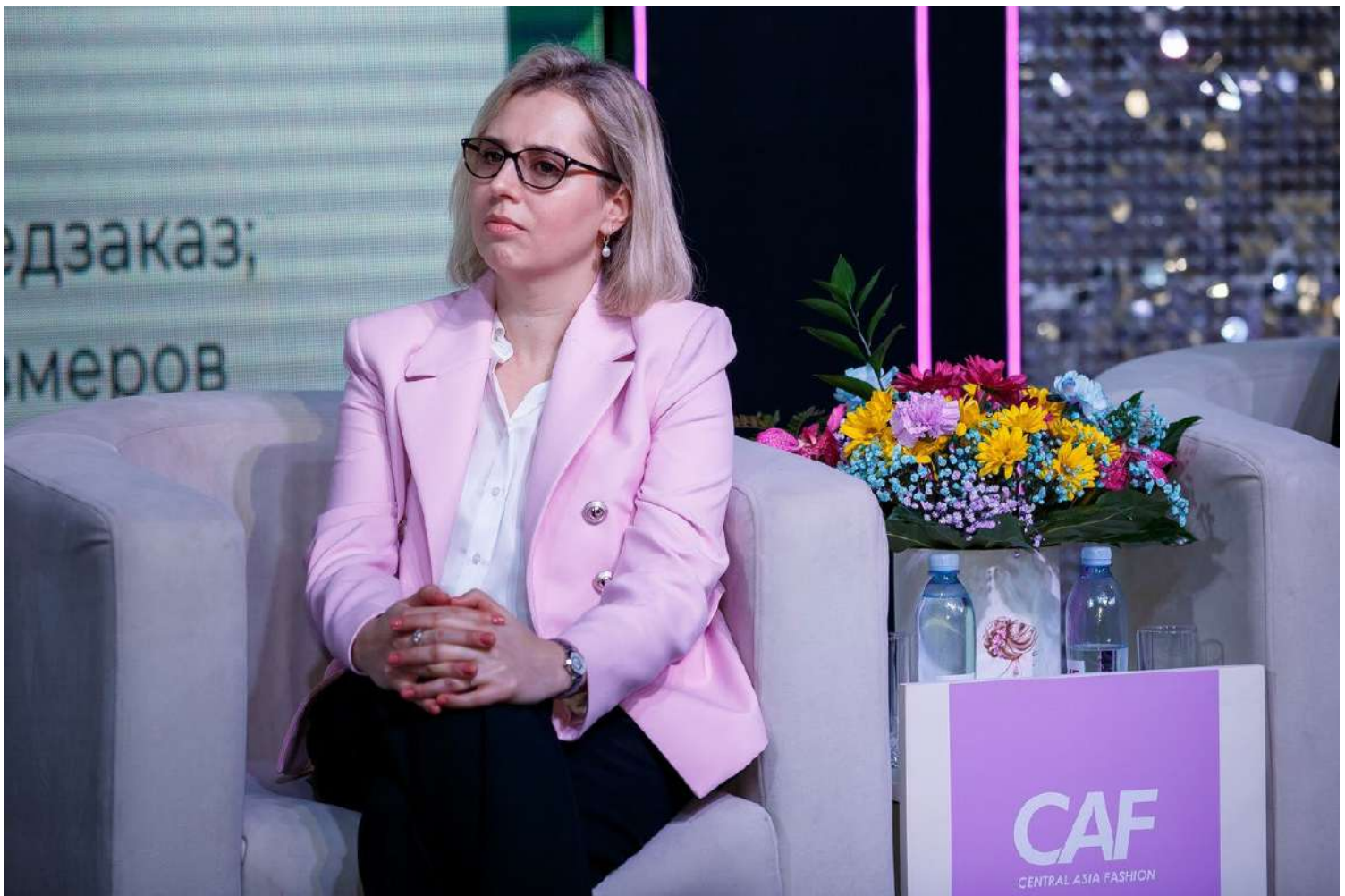


Experts of the business conference with the right (left to right): Meruert Toleubekova – franchise Manager of Retail Academy, Aliya Akhmetova – entrepreneur, blogger, founder of the Kazakhstan brand Heybaby, Ksenia Kuserbayeva – CEO, business coach of Retail Academy

### **Which segments will be most promising in 2023 and in the future**

Meanwhile, a guest of the CAF business conference specially invited from France, co-founder of the online B2B platform for fashion retail [fashionsfera.ru](https://fashionsfera.ru) Maria Peterson emphasized the importance of choosing the right segment in the problematic of the issue: *“It seems to me that in a period of such instability as we have now, the premium segment and below average are the most promising. And, of course, the main element of business is a properly assembled database and long trends. Everyone says trends, but how to apply them in life? Is it possible to see them on the street with ordinary people, and I think that maybe there is not quite the right understanding. There are really long macro trends. Which last for more than one season as a rule and are backed up by deep analytics. And there are microtrends that are quite fast and spot-on... I believe that post-pandemic fashion is two extremes: hard glamour, when everyone will dress up super, a kind of ultra-femininity. And the second extreme is something quite utilitarian, casual, sporty, oversize. Fundamentally, nothing will change globally, the main trump card will be universality”.*

Speaking about the trends emerging in Kazakhstan, the expert of the CAF business conference Evgeniya Ukasova noted that the two main local growing trends in Kazakhstan – buyers are more actively advocating conscious consumption, and in addition, they choose and look for interesting local brands.



Co-founder of the online B2B platform for fashion retail fashionsfera.ru, ex-representative of the French Pret-a-port Federation in Russia – Maria Peterson (France, Lyon)

**What should the fashion business focus on and stay sustainable**

In the question of focusing on numbers and analytics, the speaker of the CAF business conference, Retail Academy franchise Manager, ex-field director of The Body Shop and Josiny chain stores Meruert Toleubekova also highlighted



Speaker of the panel discussion of the CAF business conference – Meruert Toleubekova, Franchise Manager of Retail Academy, ex-field director of The Body Shop and Josiny chain stores

one of the current problems of retail: *“The big pain for today is the staff. If earlier we, the employees, and I also started with the seller, were grateful to the employer that we have a job today, now employers are grateful to the employees that they came to work and are ready to sell. We talk about numbers, products, trends, and the database, but we forget about the people who will sell it. I insist that now retailers should definitely focus on staff, their training and high-quality hiring”.*

### **Is it possible to increase the profitability of the retail business in an uncertain time**

At the same time, business experts are confident that it is possible to increase income during the current uncertainty. Thus, the speaker of the CAF business conference Evgeniya Ukasova believes that the path is quite narrow, but there is: *“It is necessary to remember two things: we are working either to increase sales or to reduce costs. Or both at the same time, always and constantly. There are no other options to increase profitability,”* the expert notes.

In turn, Ksenia Kuserbayeva calls on entrepreneurs to be bold in making decisions: *“Now is the time when it is necessary and possible to take risks. And this notorious testing of smart hypotheses – what is it really about? About a thousand and one attempts to allow yourself to try! But retailers should understand that the more they try, the more they will make mistakes and fail, and this is absolutely normal. Take risks and try, because there is no other way to survive in an era of change and uncertainty”.*



Experts of the panel discussion of the CAF business Conference (from left to right): Meruert Toleubekova, Aliya Akhmetova, Ksenia Kuserbayeva, Maria Peterson, Evgeniya Ukasova, Milena Ershova

### **ABC book of retail. What should a fashion business owner do in 2023**

Whereupon, according to the new tradition of the business conference of the International Fashion Exhibition Central Asia Fashion, the experts of the business conference continued to give recommendations to fashion business and expand their “ABC book of retail CAF”. So, Ksenia Kuserbayeva advised the owners of the fashion business to follow the rule of “three U”: *“Now the main things in business are management, diligence and success. Not each one by itself, but sequentially from top to bottom. Today, those who manage do not just observe passively, but participate in the process. And if you and I have already joined the management, then you need to show diligence and patience and only then success will naturally come”.*

Aliya Akhmetova, founder of the fashion brand, speaker of the CAF business conference, recommends to take “volatility”, “engagement” and “choice” as a basis: *“To live in an era of change and do business, as I have already said. The question is with what physical training to go for it. However, if you are not fully involved in the process, it is*

*impossible to get a result. And probably the most important thing is the choice: get up or stay down”, – the expert shares her opinion.*

Expert Meruert Toleubekova advises retailers to pay attention to the possibilities of “marketing”, “management” and management of people, resources and processes, as well as the use of online tools and, in particular, “marketplaces”.

In turn, fashion retail expert, general producer of Central Asia Fashion, chief moderator of the business conference Milena Ershova in her choice of important words “ABC book of Retail” stressed the importance of “personal brand”, communication with “opinion leaders” and flexibility in “logistics”.

Meantime, CAF special guest Maria Peterson noted the inevitability of “eco-friendliness” of fashion and emphasized “emotions” as the main driver of sales and profit as a result of work efficiency. The expert of the CAF business conference, Evgenia Ukasova, highlighted “financial literacy” and analytics, “forkasting” and forecasting in the short term, and the “functionality” of the staff and the owner of the business as the main ones for retail.



Participants of the panel discussion of the CAF business Conference (from left to right): Meruert Toleubekova, Aliya Akhmetova, Ksenia Kuserbayeva, Milena Ershova, Maria Peterson, Evgenia Ukasova

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