

THE XL GANG

A growing number of retailers are responding to the demand for outsized garments, writes David Young.

No-one ever really spares a thought for the big fella. It's always the little guy who garners the attention. Blame Goliath for them never getting their due. Wee David was the one who walked away with all the kudos. And ever since, regular Joe and any of his less than average-sized counterparts have been decked out in the finest of clobber.

Large men often have to look on, and wonder what might have happened if the slingshot had missed, and they'd resolved matters by talking. And so, where being tall is lauded, being hefty is not quite as sought after.

But being kingsize doesn't mean you can't be as smartly tailored as the next guy. Certainly, you shouldn't have to settle for second best. Where once it was nigh on impossible to shop for a larger body in Ireland, now there's a choice of outlets. Even though it means making a trek for some, it certainly saves on leaving the country, or shopping blind online.

And so, the end-of-the-rack guy - the fellow who's on the cusp of not fitting anything in store - is at last starting to get the service he deserves. The days of fashion foregone are over. And not before time too.

Kingsize.ie

Established only a couple of years ago by Roscommon native, Justin Dixon, Kingsize today lays claim to being the home of big and tall menswear in Ireland on merit - they've got the widest selection available in-store, or for that matter, at their fingertips. You want it, they'll get it. Well, they are, as they say, the purveyors of outsized menswear of any description.

"There would've been a tendency for people to think that a big guy should be happy that he's not naked," says Dixon, utterly candid. "People would think - 'Sure,

he got trousers to fit him and a white shirt. A black T-shirt and what not, and sure isn't he alright?' - You know. But big guys want fashion."

"A guy comes in here, and he could be a 5XL. And he's looking for a shirt," adds Dixon. "We'd have at least 25 to show him. On the rail. And we're under no pressure. If he goes into another shop - the odd one that would have a 3XL - he'll meet a sales assistant who'll sell him something that won't fit him, just to make a sale."

The importance of providing a professional service and, crucially, expert advice on sizing is where specialist retailers come into their own. "Knowing your waist size is one thing," Dixon mentions. "It's above the waist, the problem is. One fella could buy a 2XL shirt and it'll fit him. Another fella, it would be swingin' on him. That's where we step in, and that's where we succeed. In fashion."

Dixon admits: "We were concerned when we opened that customers might find a stigma attaching to the name Kingsize. Like, 'I'm announcing to the world that I'm big if I go in there'. But these lads don't give a damn. They tend to be pleasant, happy-go-lucky kind of fellas. And they want a bit of style.

"So, we do hoodies and cargo pants, and mish mash jeans. We want to kit a guy out who wants to look like his mate, who's a medium, and he a 4XL," booms Dixon. "He doesn't want to wear his ould fellas clothes." Cleverly, he's on the money. With stores like Kingsize stocking up to 9XL casual wear; 64" trousers; 38" inside leg; and footwear up to size 16, there's real choice at last - for the big fella.

Where? 16 Dawson St, Dublin 2 and 9 Tuam Road Retail Centre, Galway.

Mr Big n' Tall

With two generations of experience, Mr Big n' Tall proudly supplies all makes of clothing and footwear, home and abroad - offering trousers in waist sizes ranging

from 44" to 80"; shirts from big 2XL to 10XL and tall from 1XLT to 4XLT. They've also got shoes and trainers in sizes 12 to 17.

Where? 6 Goatstown Cross, Dublin 14.

Mr XLS

David Sloan's shop in Swords, Co Dublin offers up quality clothing for the outsize guy. No more nightmares when trying to track down top gear. Here the focus is still firmly placed on the traditional values of service. And it's all about the XLS cutting a dash.

Where? 3A Castle Shopping Centre, Swords, Co Dublin.

ONLINE

Jacamo.ie

For those who prefer not to bother with traipsing into town, or who know their dimensions, there's always the comfort of online retail. Irish retailer Jacamo.ie stocks big name brands in sizes up to 3XL, 4XL and 5XL, while their jeans are available up to a 54" waist. They also stock high end sports gear, as well as shoes, boots and trainers. Factor in home delivery too and it all adds up to a comprehensive offering.

A LAST WORD ON BIG BUSINESS

In the US, retailers chasing market growth are turning to the more sizable man. Offering selection and service, the largest American big-and-tall chain has watched closely and noted revenue increasing in this category - to the tune of 40 per cent faster than sales of regular-size apparel. Business, you've had your card marked.

