

Online boutique takes brave step with weekly sales

By [Michael Bleby](#)

29 Apr 2010

Blink and you will miss it. Click and you might win.



This is the model driving [36boutiques](#), a high-end fashion retailer that officially launched yesterday, 28 April 2010.

The online store, a project of Naspers's MIH internet division, sells local and foreign branded clothing such as Hermanna Rush, Stefania Morland and Ben Sherman at a discount of up to 80% — but there is a catch. You can only buy online during the 36-hour sale window.

“There are not a lot of people doing apparel online successfully in SA,” Nicky Boy, 36boutiques' head of business, said yesterday.

“There's not much compared with the rest of the world. We're going to catch up fast.”

Modelled on the French site [vente privee.com](#), the start-up seeks to take a piece of SA's growing online retail market, which consultancy World Wide Worx estimated to be worth R929m in 2007.

The retailer targets the cash-rich and time-poor who buy online. Once a week it holds a sale of items from one label — possibly one-off items, fashion show items or ready-to-wear clothes. Once the sale closes, that's it. The following week will be something else.

“It is not a 24-hour boutique. It's only for 36 hours and every week is a different designer and brand. It becomes quite a novel thing,” said Dion Chang, a consumer trend analyst with consultancy Flux Trends.

With three sales down, the site has fans. “The couple of shirts I bought are not factory rejects and came at a bloody good price. I was pleasantly surprised,” Chang said.

There is money to be made in online clothing retail. Johann Rupert's Richemont, which earlier this month paid £225m for

the remaining two thirds of site net-a-porter.com it did not already own, thinks so. So does 36boutiques' parent company.

Online retailing in SA was “almost greenfields” territory, said Paul Casarin, MIH's head of new e-commerce for Africa. “It's a really interesting business for us to pursue.”

But there are pitfalls, especially in SA, where internet shopping penetration is low.

While people may be comfortable buying a commodity such as a book or handbag online, what about something as subjective as clothing?

“The big issue is return and if something doesn't fit,” said Julian Wentzel, a retail analyst and head of research at Macquarie First South Securities.

Boy agrees. “It's really tricky to take someone used to having interaction with clothing in a real situation into a virtual space,” she said. The site has detailed images of every item and guides for fitting. Returns are designed to be “not a hassle”, Boy said.

The company, which has a three year projection to break even, was in talks with a private bank to target their clients, she said.

Source: Business Day

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>