



Rand Outfitters carry the brands and footwear styles to meet the needs of their diverse customer base aged 24-45 – from urban youths, sports brand fans, and non-branded fashion followers.

Above: Riad, Ashraf and Mohammed are members of the Laher family that owns and runs the chain.

A family born to retail success

Reasons for the Laher's success

- The Laher family has retailing in their blood and all work together to make a success of their stores;
- The Lahers adapt and change to keep up with consumer and retailing trends;
- They cater for a wide range of customers: from trendy young urban youths, brand-conscious fashion shoppers to the middle-aged customers who prefer comfort footwear;
- Their stores are in the township malls where most of their customers shop.
- They sell lots of brands at good prices.

By adapting to changing consumer trends the Laher family has grown a successful mini-chain of retail stores selling the top lifestyle brands

For close to 70 years the Laher family has been part of Gauteng retail history. Today, the family is providing their hip and young customers with the urban streetwear and sport lifestyle brands they love, while also catering for the needs of customers looking for non-branded fashion and comfort wear.

Their mini-chain of Rand Outfitter stores, offering the latest lifestyle brands in a modern setting, are a far cry from the first small outfitter M.M.I. Laher opened in Wynberg in 1955.

Over the past 50-60 years they have grown a successful retail business by adapting and staying at the forefront of changing consumer trends. For example, a few years after the father of one of the current owners opened the IS Laher and Sons store in 1955, they made history by becoming the first store to supply ready-made clothing to the women of Alexandra.

Until then, most women made their own dresses and few shops stocked off-the-peg dresses and women's specific clothing. Ashraf Laher explains that his father's shop was one of the first to stock women's dresses and what he calls *exclusive* clothing.

In 1963 the Men's and Boy's Outfitters in the Springs CBD opened, which was bought by the current branch of the Laher family in 1981. Ashraf Laher became manager of this traditional family outfitter.

They bought the first Rand Outfitters in Springs in 1983, which has since grown into a successful chain of branded stores catering for men's, ladies and kiddies footwear.

The whole Laher family is involved in the retail trade and over the past thirty years own-

To survive in the retail industry today, retailers should change and adapt with the times

ers Ashraf and Mohammed and Riad Laher (MD) have transformed Men's and Boy's Outfitters into the modern, brand-driven lifestyle fashion retail chain, Rand Outfitters.

Apart from the head office and 4 000m² warehouse they own in Springs, they have two other branches in Springs, and stores in the Daveyton Mall (Benoni), Vosloorus, Birch Acres Mall (Tembisa) and Tsakane Mall.

In November they opened two new stores in Secunda, bringing the total number to eight. They aim to soon have ten stores.

To survive in the retail industry today, retailers should change and adapt with the times, is Ashraf Laher's firm belief.

Therefore, they also opened an online website called Brands Online in 2008, which is targeted towards a different target market than their stores, which are aimed at LSM 3-8. The website consumer target market is a higher LSM than the brick and mortar stores, as reflected in the price categories on offer.

While online retailing has been booming internationally, South Africa is quite new to this trend, says Riad. Brands Online had quite a few trials and errors before it was running smoothly, as there are no real guidelines for online shopping in South Africa.

This year, however, with the opening of Zandos and other online stores, their online re-

tail business has especially been growing, he continues. Thanks to the large online retailers spending large amounts of their marketing budgets on advertising, more and more South Africans are becoming more comfortable with buying shoes and clothing online.

Retailing today is a completely different ball game to what it was 50 - 60 years ago, comments Riad.

Their new lifestyle stores have a fast-growing consumer market – the lower LSM and upwardly mobile shoppers who frequent township malls. The opening of township malls have shifted Saturday trading towards the townships and they have felt the drop in Saturday and weekend trading in their CBD stores.

But, this shift in shoppers towards the townships have, however, also opened the market for new competitors.

"The market has become much more competitive," explains Riad. "Today there is a wider range of products available and one has to sell it for smaller margins to compete with neighbouring retailers. Back in the olden days one had a limited range and one had more control over margins.

"You also compete with foreigners like the Chinese, Ethiopians and Somalians who sell products at very low prices because of their low overheads. They have a good financing model overseas, whereby a group of them would import directly from China and they would bring their own stock in to keep their overheads low. "They buy in high numbers and sell in low margins. They also stock a lot of knock-off brands and sell it for a very cheap price," complains Riad.