Blair Corporation

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary ..................................................................................................................3

Introduction ..........................................................................................................................4

Methodology .........................................................................................................................11

Competitive Analysis ............................................................................................................12

Conclusion ............................................................................................................................22

Recommendations .................................................................................................................23

Appendix ..............................................................................................................................29

Acknowledgments:

Special thanks to top management for taking the time to read this report.
Executive Summary

As obesity in America continues to grow, many retailers are seeing an opportunity to expand their brand(s) to extended size customers. Our class was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to work as retail consultants for Blair Corporation, a member of the Orchard Brands family. Over the course of the semester, we have worked to help Blair assess the extended plus size market and identify appropriate product and positioning methods.

We were first given an overview of the company and their target market by Marisa Smith, the Vice President of Menswear, Merchandising Operations, and Quality and Logistics at Blair. We then took a tour of Blair’s facilities in Warren, Pennsylvania. This gave us a good understanding of Blair’s background and how they operate their business.

Next, we conducted researched on the obesity trend in America and how obesity directly affects the retail industry. We also created an analysis of the extended size consumer to see what key factors influence their fashion choices. After conducting research on these two categories, it was clear to our team that it would be beneficial for Blair to enter the extended size market.

We created a competitive analysis of other retailers who offer plus size men’s clothing. We chose five competitors and compared their selection of plus size mens Fall merchandise to Blair’s. We also compared their pricing and promotions.

Now that our research process has been completed and the semester has come to an end, we have come up with several recommendations for Blair as they enter the extended size market.
Introduction

According to the New York Times, three out of every four American men are overweight (Overweight and Obesity Statistics). The plus size clothing market grew to 17.5 billion dollars last year, while the NPD Group stated that there was a nine percent increase for people between the ages of 55 to 64 in obesity (Maheshwari). The number of people who are considered to be obese is rising every day, and are found most commonly in adults in Blair’s demographic age group. Many retailers, including Blair, are seeing this as an opportunity to expand their brand to the plus size market. We will discuss the plus sized market, it’s effect on the retail industry as well as the type of product this market seeks out.

Before Blair can successfully enter the plus size market, it is crucial for the company to get a good understanding of the plus size market, the plus size consumer, and other competitors in this market. Our team researched five different competitors and made several comparisons to Blair. We will show where Blair stands in marketing by evaluating advertisements and promotions. We also took a look at customer experience, and overall satisfaction between businesses. Our most extensive comparison of the companies came in merchandising. We will show how Blair compares in sizes offered, products offered and varieties within those products. After evaluating Blair, its competition, and the plus sized market, we have come up with several recommendations for Blair to increase profits, customers and customer satisfaction.

Obesity in the United States

Due to the recent rise of obesity in this country, there has been a high demand for companies to produce larger products to accompany those with this disease. Many companies
already have an abundance of products with varying sizes to accommodate this market. Companies are making very general products to suit the needs of these individuals such as umbrellas, wider wheelchairs, and larger jewelry (13 Oversized Products for Overweight People 13). However, many fashion designers including: Tommy Hilfiger, Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein, Vince Camuto, and Michael Kors all have extended plus sizes (Widdicombe 14). All of these designer companies have extended sizes, except they are not advertised alongside their normal clothing lines. In fact, they aren’t advertised at all. They are sold to large department stores including Macy’s because they do not want to tarnish the brand’s reputation. Other companies including Lands’ End are not afraid to advertise their larger sizes on their website. On their website, Lands’ End has it broken down into their own individual sections. Not only does Lands’ End have their own section for bigger cloths but it also has the sizes for their clothes. Lands’ End goes up to a XX-Large, which has a waist measurement of 44-46 inches, and 47-48.5 in the hips (Lands’ End 15). This is a common trend in the industry. Other companies such as L.L. Bean also have expanded sizes for their customers. Similar to Lands’ End, L.L. Bean’s pants go up to size 46 inches (L.L. Bean 16).

Overall, the market has already gone towards the larger consumer. Companies ranging from L.L. Bean to pristine designers such as Michael Kors offer clothing for the plus size market. This is a large market that still has much potential for new entrants.

**How Does Obesity Affect the Retail Industry?**
Studies show that over one-third of Americans are obese (Ogden 26). This means that there are about 105 million people who suffer from obesity. The fact that so many Americans are considered to be obese presents a huge opportunity for retailers to expand their services to the plus size market. According to Buzzfeed.com, the plus size clothing market grew to 17.5 billion dollars last year alone (Maheshwari 27). The National Purchase Diary, NPD Group, stated that this was a nine percent increase for men ages 55 to 64, which is a large part of Blair’s demographic. The same article from Buzzfeed says that most of this growth is coming from online retailers. For example, ModCloth has recently doubled its selection of plus size clothing and The Limited has introduced its own plus size brand that can only be found online. Most plus size shoppers say that shopping in stores is usually a negative experience due to rude salespeople and judgmental looks from other shopper, which is most likely why the online shopping option is so popular with the plus size market (Bogenreif 28). However, many stores seem to finally be embracing the obesity trend after ignoring it for so long. For example, Forever 21 has been reconstructing their stores across the country to make room for a plus size section.

The obesity trend in America has provided the retail industry with a huge opportunity to expand their brands and attract more customers. As the plus size demographic continues to grow in America, it seems to become more and more clear that retailers should take advantage of this.

**Obesity in Older Adults**

According to the CDC, an adult who has a BMI of 30 or higher is considered obese. In the United States, adults that are in the age range of 40-59 years old currently have the highest obesity rate. The Blair customer is second on this list, with 35.4% of adults 60 and over being
obese (CDC 8). Although these customers are scattered throughout the United States, the mid-south-east has the largest concentration of self-reported obesity (CDC 9). Blair’s corporate location is located in the midst of this concentration, allowing them to truly understand their customer. According to the CDC, men who have higher incomes have a higher likelihood of being obese (CDC 8). It is clear that these customers are more likely to experience health risks throughout the duration of their lives. These health issues do not only affect this customer, however. In 2012, 21% of annual medical spending was due to obesity related illnesses in the United States (NLC 12). A study recently conducted by Harvard University has proven that if recent trends in obesity continue, by the year 2030, over 50% of men and women in the United States will be obese (Obesity Prevention Source 10).

**Key Drivers in Plus Size Fashion**

When researching key drivers when it comes to men’s plus size fashion, it became clear that the main focus is shape. Plus size men are very concerned with how the garment lays on their body. As stated in the article, 7 Style Tips for Large Men: The Big Man’s Guide to Sharp Dressing, “You want the cloth to rest lightly on your body — not hugging it tight and not hanging off your skin with visible folds of extra cloth” (The Art of Manliness 2). Although men feel more comfortable with loose fitting clothing, there is a fine line between a perfect fit and the clothing being too baggy. it is extremely important that the plus size male purchases their true size, not a size that will hide their shape.

*Fabric*
The material that an article of clothing is made of has the ability to completely alter the fit and appearance of the garment. “The difference between fine wool trousers and a pair of thick denim jeans doesn’t sound like much, but when you try the pants on you realize just how significant the upgrade can be. A smooth, light fabric that drapes in clean lines is always going to make a large man look, and feel, better than something chunky (The Art of Manliness 2). Although it may seem that thicker, heavier fabrics may be able to mask imperfections on the body. These fabrics add extra size and bulk to the body that can be avoided by using lighter materials.

Tops

When a plus size customer is shopping for tops, they are looking for colors and patterns that will work with their shape, not against it. “Good clothes for large men keep the patterns to a minimum. Broad, solid spaces help complement your shape — be thinking solid-color jackets, lightly striped shirts, and so on, rather than anything with busy graphics or patterns”(The Art of Manliness 2). Not only should plus size consumers stay away from busy patterns or graphics, but they should also steer clear of horizontal or vertical stripes. These tend to elongate the body and may ultimately make the customer seem larger than they really are. The plus size customer is also looking for tailored business shirts. This consumer is likely to wear this type of shirt both tucked in and untucked. Both of these tops, however, should be cut to different lengths. Although an untucked shirt should not be short, the tucked in button down shirt should have extra length, to ensure that the shirt will stay tucked in to the pant at all times.

Bottoms
For the plus size male, where the pant hits on the customers waste is a key component to customer satisfaction. “The most flattering thing a larger man can do with his trousers is wear them high — around the natural waist, well above the hips. This lets the fabric drape over the stomach and fall in a smooth front down the body” (Centeno 5). Because this customer wants pants that sit higher on the waste, it is important to take into consideration how they would keep the pants from falling down. The plus size male would rather wear suspenders than a belt, because belts tend to create a line or bulge around the waist. “Because the shape of the stomach tapers, a circular band around it is just going to slip right off — it’s like trying to fasten a collar around the lower third of a basketball”(The Art of Manliness 2). By wearing suspenders, they are able to keep a slim, straight look from head to toe. To further accentuate the slimming effect of suspenders, “…straight or slightly tapered cuts are the way to go when it comes to jeans, chinos and tailored bottoms” (Weil 7), as stated in the article, Plus Size Men Dressing & Fashion Tips.

Who is the Extended Size Customer?

Before a company can create a successful new product line there must first be demand for it. There is no demographic with such increasing demand as with the extended size consumer. These customers are tired of having to brave the malls and shops to find what they are looking for. Blair focus needs ses on meeting these and providing an experience that is sometimes overlooked by other retailing corporations. Since Blair’s customers are generally ages 65 and older there will be a large portion of the population (Generation X) that will be entering into this age category. Along with the added Baby Boomers, Blair will need to look at how they operate and perhaps make some changes to solidify continual business.
Because Blair has only two brick and mortar locations they rely heavily on catalog purchases to stay in business. The extended size consumer does prefer to order from home however with the new generations nearing the target market of Blair they will be far more technically savvy and will prefer to do their shopping online. These consumers generally have a mid range income and tend to spend their money

The new generation Blair will be reaching does not want to be bogged down with customer service phone calls, or slow order responses. Blair will need to make sure their new customers are receiving the care and quick attention that they require, or else they will miss out on some huge opportunities. It is obvious that Blair cares about their history and lineage, but when selling to Generation X, it is best to leave the history in the past (Blair 4). They are more concerned about what the business is doing now to meet their needs rather than where they came from. Blair is an old fashioned company that panders to old fashioned consumers, but with the changing times they must be willing to step into the modern way companies do business. Having a strong online presence will help Blair when their new consumers decide to look for customer reviews and product complaints.

Generation X uses the web to shop more than any other generation (Blair 4.) This means that the 23% of sales that Blair does over the web now will most likely double in the near future. Along with a change in how orders are received, Blair is going to have to find way to handle new problems brought about by the increased web presence of their customers. Blair has always been successful with their catalogs, but using catalogs to do the majority of business can leave them at a disadvantage if they cannot handle the quick response time of web purchases.
How the Customer Shops

Throughout the development of the plus size market, consumers and retailers have not always been on the same page. Many consumers that shop plus size departments often feel defeated and worse about their appearance after shopping in brick and mortar stores. This is due to many retail stores ignoring the tastes and preferences of the plus size shopper. After visiting various retailers, it appears that the majority of shoppers are not shopping for pleasure, but rather, out of need. Many customers feel ashamed to be shopping in the plus size department, and feel that they are constantly being watched and judged. This causes them to shop quickly, and often do not try clothing on while in the stores. On the other hand, when a plus size customer finds a retailer or brand that fits them correctly, they are more likely to return and spend more money at that specific store (Anderson 29).

Methodology

We began our research by visiting Blair’s design and distribution centers in Warren, Pennsylvania. This trip have us a good understanding on Blair’s background. From there, we conducted an analysis of the extended size male customer, mainly by researching trends in the plus sized market. Then, we chose five companies who we thought were Blair’s biggest competitors. Our team members individually researched Kohl’s, J.C. Penney, Destination XL, Casual Male XL, and King Size Direct. We accessed each of their websites to find how much Fall merchandise was offered in men’s sizes 4XL and up in a variety of categories such as active wear, suits, shoes, tops, etc. We then looked at what the price ranges were for each category. Our team also visited several of these stores and made phone calls in order to find out what kind
of promotions they use and how their products are distributed. Finally, we came up with several recommendations for Blair Corporation to consider as they take the opportunity to extend their brand to the plus size market.

**Competitive Analysis**

**J.C. Penney**

J.C. Penney is a large competitor in the clothing and home decorating retail market. They are one of the largest department store chains in the country with an equally extensive online website, and offer new promotions every day on select items.

Their website is very colorful with many different tabs going across the top to make the different sections organized and easy to navigate. There are also advertisements for certain promotions J.C. Penney is currently running. These promotional advertisements are spread throughout the website. Most of the items on their website have various promotions. Some of the promotions that are available online are not in the stores. This is a good way for J.C. Penney to boost their online sales and eliminate consumers from shopping with one of their competitors.

The distribution of J.C. Penney products is extremely vast. J.C. Penney has over 1,100 stores, in addition to being a large online retailer. J.C. Penney reaches their large customer base by taking advantage of seasonal catalogs. They also have email listings where customers can find the lowest prices on certain items that are on sale.

The most common complaint found on a customer review website for J.C. Penney is that their sales people are rude or unhelpful. However, the plus size merchandise reviews were mostly positive. Most of the reviews got 4.5 out of 5 stars. Many pleased customers said that the products fit very well and how the materials used are very soft and comfortable for all day wear.
Figure 1 contains information gathered from the J.C. Penney’s website looking at the different clothes they offer. This information was collected from October 26 through October 29, 2014.

Kohl’s

One of the key competitors that Blair faces is Kohl’s. They are an efficient retailer with many years of experience. Kohl’s not only offers shoppers a physical store to do all of their clothing and home appliance shopping needs; they also have an extensive online store that is quick and convenient in serving the online shopper.

Upon entering Kohl’s website, one is greeted by colorful arrays of various clothing and garments and bold fonts outlining their hottest sale. Banners reading “free shipping” scroll across the top of the page and drop-down windows appear giving the user the ability to sign up for credit cards and rewards programs. This form of cluster advertising can be useful by giving the user everything they are looking for and incentivizing their patronage for big rewards. Sometimes this amount of ads can scare users off and can over stimulate the average shopper.

Although Kohl’s offers a seemingly infinite number of items on their website, they also offer many of the same items in stores. Popular items such as sweaters, boots, and bottoms not only are visible from the home page of their website but are prominently displayed near the entrances of all Kohl’s locations. They know that one reason why their customers shop with them is for the one-stop-shop experience. Companies like Blair that do not have much brick and mortar presence would be smart to take advantage of Kohl’s market.

One commonality among all of Kohl’s items are that most, if not all, of their items have been on sale. Their website is bombarded with ads stating “BOGO” or “50% off entire stock”. It
is obvious that Kohl’s is trying to make their profits off of volume of goods sold. This could be an advantage to their competitors as well as a disadvantage to those selling to Kohl’s. Either way, Kohl’s panders to the savvy shopper and lures in the bargain hunters. This could be detrimental to a company worried about the class standard of their products.

A customer reviews website indicates that many customers have had problems with their Kohl’s card. They say that Kohl’s oftens messes things up with their payments. Most customers end up getting refunded for the mix-up, but they also report that dealing with Kohl’s customer service representatives is a nightmare.

After exploring their website, we compiled a list of the items, sizes, and prices Kohl’s has to offer, as seen in Figure 2. This information was gathered on October 26, 2014 and does not represent any sale prices. Two items that Kohl’s does not offer to their plus size customers are shoes and sleepwear. To the competition, however, these seem to be very well stocked items.

**Casual Male XL**

Casual Male XL is a one stop shop for any wardrobe needs a plus size male may have. They have both brick and mortar stores, as well as an extremely interactive and customer friendly website. Their products range from casual clothing, to high quality suits, and are priced at an average level, slightly more expensive than Blair. Their products are modern and made to fit well on a plus size male. The fabrics used are not clingy, and do not shrink, appealing specifically to the larger market.

The website from Casual Male XL is extremely user friendly and allows customers to easily find what they need. Shoppers can make a size profile, which allows them to shop for
items that are specifically available in their size. In stores, the shopping experience was equally as enjoyable. Customers are able to shop on their own, or seek assistance from one of the knowledgeable sales clerks in the store.

This retailer uses many promotions and deals on their websites in order to influence customers to purchase more. Shoppers are able to give their email addresses to receive promotional news, and are also asked to just the XL Rewards Club. As a member of this program, customers receive points that can be spent in the store, birthday bonuses, preorder specials, and more.

Casual Male XL sells products via their website, or in-store customer service. Due to their lack of customer contact outside of the store locations, not many reviews can be found online about their customer service. The few reviews that can be found are generated by Yelp users, based on their in store interactions. The strong majority of these reviews are positive, and most customers feel this way because of their in store experiences. One customer stating, “I have never experienced anything less than stellar customer service”(Yelp). Overall, the customers of this retailer seem to be very pleased with them and how they conduct their sales.

Because Casual Male XL focuses solely on plus size men, they have many more items available to their customers. As seen in Figure 3, There are 389 casual shirts alone that men have to choose from that are sizes 4XL and above. This information was gathered from the Casual Male XL website on October 25, 2014.

Destination XL
Destination XL is a retailer that offers one of the most extensive assortments of the plus size man’s clothing and shoes. They carry products from many affordable brands such as Reebok, Levi’s, and Nautica as well as high end fashion designers like Michael Kors.

Destination XL also offers its own private label brands which includes Canyon Ridge, Oak Hill, Harbor Bay and 555 Turnpike. Destination XL carries up to 7XL and a 64 inch waist. They also offer hundreds of shoes in extended sizes 10-16 and widths to 5E (Destination XL).

Destination XL promotes itself in every way that it can. The company spent around 12 million dollars in 2013 on an ad campaign that included print, radio, and television ads. The New York Times said that Destination XL “did a good job of channeling the frustration that a lot of big guys have while shopping” (Newman). Their website is very user friendly and asks for an e-mail address as soon as you arrive at the homepage. If an e-mail is given, the customer will receive an e-mail immediately telling them about the rewards program. For every dollar the customer spends, they will receive one point. For every 300 points the DXL customer gets, they will receive a $15 reward certificate. Other promotions include free shipping on all orders over $100, $25 dollars off of any purchase $100 or more, store credit cards, etc. (Destination XL).

Destination XL has many modes of distribution. Aside from their website, they operate many brick-and-mortar stores. There are seven brick and mortar stores currently in Pennsylvania and the company is still expanding. These stores are typically two times bigger than their brother stores, Casual Male XL, with three times as much inventory. Destination XL stores are typically wider with bigger dressing rooms, hardwood floors, track lighting, free bottled water, on-site tailors, and televisions tuned to sports and financial programming (Newman). They also send out catalogs so that people can order by mail or telephone.
Along with Casual Male XL, Destination XL also focuses only on plus size males. After closely looking at their website, we compiled their product analysis, as seen in Figure 4. This information was gathered on October 27, 2014.

**King Size Direct**

KingSizedDirect.com is one of the largest online retailer’s in the men’s plus size market. It is the top hit when you Google “men’s plus size clothing.” The business has a very large variety of menswear and accessories. A large portion of the products comes in several colors and up to thirteen different sizes. The company is a subsidiary of the OSP Group, who also own Women Within, Roman’s and Jessica London. OSP is the largest direct mailer of specialized clothing catalogues in the United States (Men’s Big and Tall Clothing). This is important to note, because they act as an example to Blair, of how a catalogue business can move into e-commerce and still find success. The company ships to international countries despite primarily working within the continental United States. They deal primarily with third party logistic providers (King Size Direct Shipping Methods). They have a partnership with FedEx that allows the customers to track their purchases and returns. Like a growing number of retailer’s, they have their own credit card program which gives customers some benefits such as cardholder only sales and a twenty-five percent coupon.

The website is very sleekly designed with a simple user interface. Tabs sort the merchandise into ten different categories consisting of Deals, Shirts, Pants & Shorts, Activewear, Outerwear, Suiting, Underwear, Shoe’s, Accessories, and Clearance. These tabs also have a drop
down menu with about ten more sub categories, allowing the user to quickly find specific items.

Picking your items and placing an order is also made very simple.

The company is very savvy when it comes to online marketing. They get people to join the e-mailing list by offering thirty percent off and free shipping codes when the user provides their address. I signed up and receive promotional e-mails every other day. These are typically used to display featured items and inform of current sales. For instance, they are currently running a BOGO sale. King Sized is up to standards in social media, having both a Twitter and a Facebook.

There is a mixed bag as far as the businesses online reviews go. The most problematic issue that comes up is the return department. Several customers lost money in the process of refunding credit cards. Often times, when a customer returned a product that was the wrong size, they would still get the wrong size on the replacement. The cost of the products seems to be overpriced, however when you factor in the promotions, the costs are relatively low.

As seen in Figure 5, King Size Direct is the largest supplier of shoes. They offer over 500 pairs of dress shoes, alone, while Blair only offers two pairs of shoes on their website.

**Blair**

Blair’s website is very deal-focused. The featured advertisement on the website is constantly explaining the current deals. Many products are marked as “on sale”, and have both sale and original prices. The mens section features both a sale and “Under $20” section.

In comparison to their competition, Blair has a very small section of their website dedicated to the big and tall man. They carry active wear, casual shirts, dress wear, footwear,
jeans, shorts, outerwear, and pajamas. As seen in Figure 6, there are around 117 items on Blair’s website for the plus size male consumer. Most of items on Blair’s website currently only go up to a 4 or 5XL, while competitors reach 7XL in many, if not all categories. Blair also only has two brick-and-mortar stores. The majority of Blair’s ordering is done online, through catalog, or over the phone.

**Promotion and Distribution Comparison**

Figure 7 shows us how blair rivals the competition in terms of promotion. Our criteria for promotional evaluation was narrowed down to entire stock sales, cash rewards, shipping deals, credit card savings, reward points, seasonal sales, today’s deal sections, and “buy more, save more” campaigns. Two of these promotional campaigns are found in all of the researched competitors repertoires except for Blair. Reward points and “buy more, save more” can influence consumers to become returning customers as well as increase profits. Blair could also try to improve its market share by employing an entire stock sale. When customers see an ad for an entire stock sale, they are more likely to view the products than traditional promotions. This is also a great way to increase the flow on new customers while keeping reoccurring customers interested. Kohl’s appears to be the most active in promotions in our sample of businesses as they have provided advertisements for all of our promotional criteria.

Another comparison that we conducted of Blair and five competitors was the form of advertisement. Figure 8 shows us what marketing channels the competition is advertising through. The channels we chose to evaluate are catalogues, e-mails, radio, in-store, commercials and online. Blair is slightly ahead of the curve as the other predominantly online retailer, King
Size Direct. The larger brick-and-mortar retailers are more active in commercial and radio advertising, which can certainly help a business generate more brand awareness. Recommendations on how Blair can enter these channels can be found on page __.

**Comparison Experience of Casual Male XL and Blair**

The best way to compare how two companies treat their customers is to become a customer for both companies. Two retailers were chosen, in this case it is Blair and Casual Male XL. We decided to purchase our items from both companies websites since it was the only format that seemed to be fair ground for both parties. We chose to order something cheap that could potentially be miss-packaged or overlooked in the supply chain process. The item we chose were men’s boxer shorts.

The process to order the boxer shorts from Casual Male XL was like any other experience. The retail categories were listed on the left side and the user was required to narrow down their search until they found what they were looking for. Once the item was chosen the user is then able to choose size, color, and quantity. Upon order confirmation the user is asked if they’d prefer to find the item in a nearby store. Once the customer adds the item to their bag and proceeds to check out they must once again confirm their order. It is at this point that the customer can enter in promo codes. At the time the order was placed there were no sales going on that our purchase was eligible for. The site also gave options to create an account with them or to checkout as a guest. The rest of the order process was smooth and user friendly. The shipping offered was either free ship-to-store or paid shipping to your house.
The process to order the boxer shorts from Blair was also very average. Much like Casual Male XL, Blair offered similar solutions to narrowing down the customer’s search. Likewise, the user had the options of color, size, and quantity. The customer was not, however, directed to a nearby store because Blair does not have many retail locations and all stores would be too far in distance, according to the mileage options on the Blair website. They do make up for their forced shipping by offering numerous deals at checkout. What started as a $20 purchase was not only cut in half by a seasonal 50% off coupon but the shipping was also decreased to 99 cents. These incentives gave Blair a good reputation with us and made me want to choose them in the future. Blair also gave the user a chance to make an account or checkout as a guest.

The returning process for both companies was very similar yet Blair seemed to come up short. At first Blair seemed to be the more flexible business when it came to returns. Offering no time limits on their returns compared to CMXL’s 90 day return policy. Both companies even seemed equally matched with their easy to fill out return slips. Once both packages were shipped I saw a return from CMXL within 5 business days while Blair made me wait 10 – 15 days until seeing my money back in my account. Something needs to be changed with Blair’s side of the deal otherwise they could be turning bad situations into worse ones.
Conclusion

We have a better understanding of the plus sized market and have determined that market entry is vital for a clothing retailer, as one third of the United States is classified as obese. This particular consumer prefers comfort to style, however this certainly does not mean that style is not important. After researching and reviewing the different competitors in the big and tall market for men, we found that although the plus size market is, in fact, growing, there is still much room for expansion. It is clear that retailers who focus on solely plus size customers offer a much wider selection in product, fit, and size, however even general clothing retailers such as JC Penney and Kohl's still provide a large variety of choices for the plus size market. It is much easier for plus sized men to shop with online retailers because they do not have to narrow their search to only one section of a store.

Much of the competition uses the same tactics when it comes to promotions and sales. However, only few retailers offer loyalty accounts to frequent shoppers. Blair is slightly behind the competition in the variety of promotions they equip as well as the channels they use to distribute them. Due to the fact that it is five times more expensive to obtain new customers, we were very shocked by the lack of customer appreciation that plus size retailers show towards their customers.
Recommendations

There are always countless possibilities of ways to improve a business of any kind. Our recommendations take cost into serious consideration. We also have a pretty keen awareness of the competition, as it is important to keep up with these businesses, as well as trying to create a competitive advantage for Blair.

After researching the plus size market, we have found several standards that most of the competition is setting. If the plus size demographic is a market that Blair wishes to enter, then there should be a stronger push in merchandising. To stand out in this market, there should be an increase in size variations. Most of the retailers in the plus size market typically have shirt and pant sizes that go to 7 or 8 XL. In fact, of the five competitors we analyzed, all five had sizes up to 8XL in at least one category. This does not mean that Blair should plan on selling thousands of 8 XL t-shirts, but the option can comfort customers. For example, the 5 XL customers will not go through an online checkout to see that they are the biggest size individuals that this particular garment can fit. And of course, there will be many consumers who do require clothing larger than 5 XL. We think that Blair has done a good job in offering generic, comfortable clothing to this demographic, however that does not mean that the plus size demographic can’t be reached with formal wear as well. Many of the plus size stores that we have researched have some sort of formal wear section, such as suits and dress pants. Blair may simply want to increase their sizes offered in formal wear. Another category that Blair is behind the curve on, are shoes. Blair currently offers two styles of men’s shoes and does not offer wide sizes. All five of the competitors offer shoes in wide sizes and have at least 100 different options.

Another area that we feel that Blair can improve upon is advertisements. There were a couple of channels of advertisements that we think Blair can research into. Reward programs are a growing trend amongst the top retailers. These programs typically offer some sort of incentives towards the customer based on purchases. The more product a customer buys, the more savings they get in return. Incentives typically come in the form of points, store credit and even cash back. These type of promotions are great for business who want to keep existing
customers because a customer who is part of a rewards program will typically shop more frequently and avoid bouncing around from retailer to retailer. Some consumers are drawn to businesses that offer rewards because it makes shopping more fun. A reward program could possibly give Blair a large boost in sales if the customer believes that the rewards are worth buying several products. Men’s Wearhouse Perfect Fit rewards program offers it’s customers $50 dollars for every $500 they spend, as well as $30 off tuxedo rentals and free ground shipping. They also have an app that includes a section for Perfect Fit, giving the users the option to see how much points they have as well as coupons already earned. A piece of the Perfect Fit website can be seen in figure 9.

Television commercials are a time proven method of advertising. We know that this can be very expensive, especially advertising through large networks and prime time slots, however we think that off time, and unpopular channels could be an easy and beneficial start to an advertising campaign. TV channels, such as RLTV, cater specifically to senior citizens. These low market television channels would be a perfect middle ground between expensive prime time spots and no television commercials at all. Most Television providers offers hundreds, if not thousands, of channels to choose from. For every hour of television air time, there is approximately 18 minutes left for commercials. Companies with similar profits margins to Blair have a wonderful opportunity to air commercials without emptying their wallets.

Local radio ads may also be less expensive option, as Internet and satellite radio are hurting the traditional. Radio stations advertise to a broad array of consumers, who are able to listen to the ad while doing other activities such as driving. The senior citizen demographic is also more likely to listen to tradition FM/AM than online radio sites such as Pandora. According to localmarketingideas.com, small market towns, such as Erie, PA, cost anywhere from $500 to $2000 to run ads for a week (Brueski). Radio ads would also be very cheap for the company to create, as opposed to television commercials.

Facebook is a growing and inexpensive form of advertising that can reach a lot of people. The older aged demographic is very into Facebook and online shopping, leaving Blair to be in a perfect spot. As of January 2014, around 28 million Facebook users were over the age of
55. With an 80% growth rate since 2011, the 55 and up age group is by far the fastest growing age group for the website (Neal). With a Facebook page, you allow any Facebook user to search and discover Blair. They can also see advertisements from Blair in the margins of Facebook. If Blair pays a small amount of money, than Facebook will target a selected market, such as older aged individuals, and insert Blair advertisements into a persons Timeline. The website charges a daily fee of $5.00 to $15.00 that guarantees anywhere from 4 to 64 likes depending on the price the company chooses. Advertisements can be made very simply by adding a photo and a few sentences. People who like the Blair page can view these ads as soon as they are created, leaving them always up to date on the companies deals and promotions. Much like a e-mail advertising, a customer will continuously see the Blair brand and it’s products keeping the company fresh in the readers mind. With Blair in mind, more and more customers will think of going to Blair.com when making product purchases. Facebook will also allow users to find the history of the company, contact info, as well as reviews. All of this information will help out a great deal of people who use Facebook frequently, but do not like navigating through several websites. Satisfied customers can also post reviews on their own timeline by tagging Blair’s page, allowing all of that individuals friends to see the post. For example, say Jane Doe posted “I’m so happy with the sweater I bought from Blair. Nothing is more comfortable than a warm cozy sweater!” If Jane has 432 Facebook friends, than there is a chance all 432 people will see the satisfaction that Jane has had with Blair. **Figure 10** shows an example of a Facebook page designed for Blair.
Works Cited


Casual Male XL Website. 23 Oct. 2014.

DXL Destination XL. Destination XL Group, 1 Jan. 2014. Web. 5 Nov. 2014.


Kohl’s Website. 20 Oct. 2014.


"National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education & Families." Healthy Communities for a Healthy Future


### Appendix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Products offered</th>
<th>Sizes Available in this category</th>
<th>Number of options in this category 4XL and up</th>
<th>Price Range</th>
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