

SE Fashion & Beauty
HD **10 things you didn't know about H&M**
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Every H&M store has an "A Area," which is the first thing you see when you enter. It features mannequins in styled outfits to encourage shoppers to **buy**

I had my first experience 10 years ago-my first H&M shopping experience, that is! It was early November and I was in Madrid, Spain to visit my sister, who had moved there a few years before. It was chillier than I expected, so she took me to H&M to **buy** a coat. I found a pea green brocade coat with a high collar and a hook-and-eye closure-certainly a standout when most people prefer black or brown when it comes to outerwear. I don't remember how much it cost, but what struck me was that it looked like a designer piece without the high price. I bought it. I still have that coat and always pack it when I travel to colder climes.

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And today, many Filipinos will get their first H&M experience as the first H&M store in the country opens at Mega Fashion Hall.

Exactly a month ago, a **group** of Filipino journalists and I had the chance to visit the H&M headquarters in Stockholm, Sweden. Being an H&M fan, I thought I knew a lot about this **brand** (apart from the fact that it's Swedish), but boy was I wrong. In the three days we spent there with members of their design team, the PR department, the **group** that handles the photo studio for all images, their HR head, store staff, and even the CEO, it was clear that H&M was more than just a conglomerate; it was like a family. The corporate culture is one that fosters teamwork, has strong values, and all work for the same goal: to provide its customers with fashion and quality at the best price.

[caption id="attachment_196943" align="alignright" width="160"] H&M garment-recycling box[/caption]

1. H&M's founder Erling Persson came from a family of butchers. Persson started out selling **cheese**, but after a trip to the US where he saw a store selling women's dresses at very low prices, he thought it was a good **business** idea. So he opened his first women's clothing store in Västerås, Sweden in 1947 and called it Hennes (which means "hers" in Swedish). In the 60s, he wanted to expand to men's clothing, so he bought the adjacent store called Mauritz Widforss, which **sold** men's hunting and fishing gear. In 1968, he changed the name to Hennes & Mauritz, which was eventually shortened to H&M, the font of which has not changed since it was created. Curiously, no one at the **company** could remember exactly when it was created or by whom! (Their best guess was late 60s/early 70s by an interior decorator.)

[caption id="attachment_196945" align="alignleft" width="208"] Ann-Sofie Johansson, Margareta van den Bosch, Andreas Löwenstam[/caption]

2. H&M's CEO is under 40 years old. Karl-Johan Persson, the founder's grandson, was born in 1975. He assumed the CEO position in 2009. "I never had the chance to work closely with my father or grandfather, but I think our management style is quite similar in that we think about the H&M culture all the time," said Karl-Johan. "It's a lot about teamwork, delegating responsibility, constantly pushing for innovation, and having an entrepreneurial spirit." He added that a huge challenge is to keep the bureaucracy away. "We're a big **company**, but we want to keep that startup feeling, and work with fun, friendly people who have good values and great drive."

3. It is mandatory at H&M for each and every employee to work in the store at least two days of the year-that includes top management and the CEO! "I worked for two days last summer here in Sweden," Karl-Johan told us. "I think I slowed down the pace at the cashier because I found it hard to do the de-arming, folding the clothes in a nice way, and putting them in the bag," he added, with a sheepish

smile. But it's a good exercise in that they get feedback from customers and see what improvements can be made.

4. H&M is now in 55 countries. The Philippines is the 55th! Just last April, they opened the first Australian store in Melbourne; this week they opened in Sydney. In 2015, they will open the first branches in Taiwan, India, Peru, and South Africa. So what took them so long to come here? "We get that question from every country we enter," said Karl-Johan. "We always knew that the Philippines is a super interesting market, but we have to look at several things-the size of the market, fashion interest, expansion opportunities, how easy it is to do **business** in the country... We have an expansion team that had been traveling to the Philippines for four or five years, looking for the best location-that's very important." Added Hakan Andersson of H&M's communications & press department, "If we don't find it, we'd rather wait."

[caption id="attachment_196949" align="alignright" width="208"] Karl-Johan Persson[/caption]

5. In 2014, H&M opened approximately 350 new stores. Most of them were in the US, the UK, and **China**. They have 116,000 employees all over the world. The Mega Fashion Hall branch alone will have 100 sales associates. "When we open in a new market, the staff-from sales all the way to the top level-have to work in an H&M store and get training in a nearby market," said Hakan. Dan Mejia, H&M Philippines' PR manager, got his training in Singapore, **Hong Kong**, and Kuala Lumpur. "That way, the culture is transferred," added Hakan.

6. The skinny trouser is H&M's best-selling item for women all over the world. For men, it's the white shirt. "It's funny, but it took ages for them to start selling," said Ann-Sofie Johansson, head of design for H&M. "We had been trying for 10 years, and now we can't get rid of them!" she added, laughing. "We've been wanting to try looser trousers or something with flare. We want to give the customer something different, but no, they want their skinny trousers!" Andreas Löwenstam, head of menswear, said it was similar with menswear: "For such a long time, all men wanted to have were boot-cut jeans-that was the only thing we **sold**. But now I think it is much more individual, so you really would have both, the skinny would be as important as the flared ones."

[caption id="attachment_196950" align="alignleft" width="171"] H&M store facade in Stockholm[/caption]

[caption id="attachment_196944" align="alignleft" width="162"] H&M Stockholm headquarters[/caption]

[caption id="attachment_196947" align="alignright" width="171"] The H&M White Room is where ideas for collections are born and nurtured. Books are there for inspiration[/caption]

7. Yes, we will get the Alexander Wang collection! The collection drops worldwide on November 7. Wang designed 20 pieces for men and 40 for women, plus assorted accessories, such as bags, shoes, and sunglasses. Margareta van den Bosch, creative advisor who has been with H&M for 27 years, said, "Designer collaborations take more or less nine months from sketch to production. Because we also develop a lot of other things, such as special shopping bags, hangers, and labels."

8. H&M has actually turned down designers who wanted to collaborate with them. But they won't say who! The first designer collaboration was with Karl Lagerfeld in 2004. Hakan related how it happened. "One day someone said, why do we need to do another underwear campaign? Can't we do something else? Let's do a collaboration with a fashion designer. Let's do it with Karl Lagerfeld!" Apparently, the Kaiser had noticed that the girls in his office had started mixing Chanel with H&M and he realized that it was a new thing. Of course, he said yes. But believe it or not, no matter how big the designer, they all get nervous before the collection drops. "Karl called our marketing director the day before the launch. He said what if no one shows up, what if we don't sell," recalled Hakan. "Roberto Cavalli was the same, he said, I'm so scared. For the Lanvin launch, Alber Elbaz was in New York sitting in the car outside the store. He called Margareta and said, there's no line outside the store! She told him, well, you're on the wrong side of the building!" All collaboration collections have **sold** well, but the fastest to sell out were Versace in 2011 and Isabel Marant in 2013.

9. H&M is committed to its social responsibility and work with sustainability. Apart from being pro-active in making positive changes for the environment within its production-for example, training cotton farmers to use better techniques, saving **millions** of liters of water in washing denim, transporting goods via sea or train-they also encourage customers to do their part. H&M is the first fashion **company** in the world to offer customers the opportunity to bring to the store their unwanted clothes, which will then be recycled into new materials.

[caption id="attachment_196946" align="alignleft" width="160"] Mood **board** for the men's autumn 2014 collection[/caption]

[caption id="attachment_196951" align="alignleft" width="171"] Every season, the photo studio receives 60,000 pieces to be shot for the lookbooks, campaigns, and online catalogs[/caption]

10. There are several categories under the H&Mbrand. Besides the obvious sections-ladies, men, kids, underwear, activewear, maternity, and accessories-there are concepts within. For example, for ladies, there is "modern classic," which you will recognize by its gray label; "trend," which speaks for itself and can be a little higher priced; "everyday," which picks out styles from modern classic and trend, and makes them more affordable; LOGG, which stands for Label Of Graded Goods and is for the outdoorsy type; Divided, which is inspired by streetwear; and Conscious Collection, their eco-friendly line, which uses sustainable material such as organic cotton. (H&M is the biggest user of organic cotton in the world.)

H&M opens today at 9am till midnight at Mega Fashion Hall, SM Megamall. The first 200 in line will get gift cards up to P6,000. There will be opening-day discounts of up to 50% off. Regular store hours of 10am-10pm will resume on October 20. H&M will open soon at SM Makati, Robinsons Magnolia, Robinsons Manila, and SM North Edsa

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