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Do You Have Money Hanging in Your Closet? Clothes with the Best Resale Value

Concerns about sustainability and a rise in online secondhand shops make it easy to resell apparel.

By Beth Braverman | Edited by Barri Segal | Reviewed by Tanza Loudenback, CFP | Sept. 19, 2023, at 1:12 p.m.

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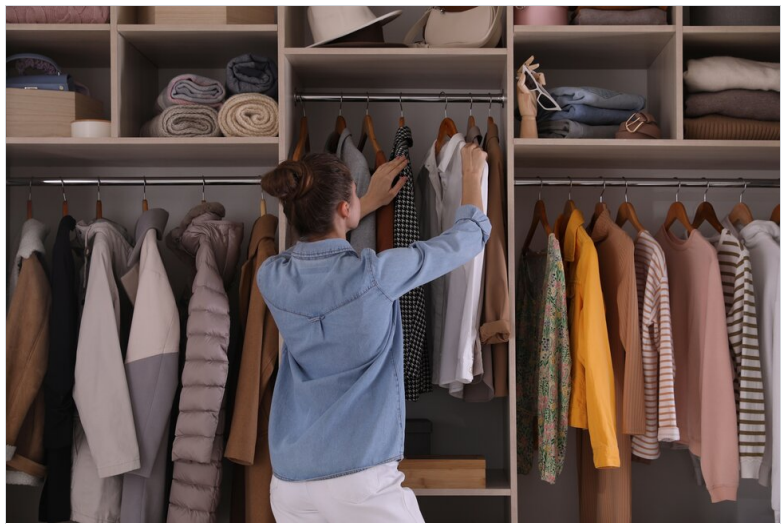

While the average clothing item may be harder to sell as it gets older, there's always a market for designer clothing from previous seasons. (GETTY IMAGES)

Whether you call them vintage, pre-owned or simply used, it's never been more mainstream to purchase and wear secondhand clothing items.

Growing concerns about sustainability and a rise in online secondhand shops that make it easy to resell apparel mean more consumers – and brands – are embracing the concept of clothing resale. Plus, as inflation pushes prices up, many consumers see secondhand shopping as a way to stretch their clothing budgets.

"It's a necessity," says Chris Garrett, store manager at Do Good Co., a vintage boutique in Kansas City, Missouri, that donates all proceeds to charity. "People – both those with money and those without money – are looking at ways to cut their costs."

The Secondhand Market Has Flourished

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The secondhand market has flourished in recent years, growing from an estimated value of $5 billion in 2018 to $21 billion in 2023, according to a report by online thrift store ThredUp, which predicts that the market will double by 2027.

In addition to traditional and online thrift stores and vintage shops, well-known brands – including Levi's, Lululemon and Patagonia – have begun reselling pre-owned merchandise to consumers.

That's great news for consumers, not only because they get access to greener, more affordable clothing items. It also provides an opportunity for consumers to resell items in their own closets and earn some extra cash while giving new life to clothing they no longer want. But some used items are more valuable than others.

Nadia Rachal, a full-time reseller who runs the Poshmark closet @Nilesy, says it's important to do online research before listing items to get a sense of what's trending and a ballpark idea of how to price your merchandise.

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Here's a look at some of the items with the best resale value right now:

Sneakers

Sneakers have become a collectible item with a market of their own, so like-new sneakers sell quickly, and often at prices higher than similar new items.

Rachal says that some resellers who are wearing sneakers they plan to later resell even put protective covers over the soles or insides of the shoes to keep them pristine.

Tag-on Clothes

While many consumers consider resale platforms as primarily a place to vend used clothing, items that still have tags on sell extremely quickly, although buyers do expect to buy them at a discount.

"If you bought something and have buyers' remorse, but you missed the return window, that's a premium item on a resale marketplace, because buyers know that the condition is going to be great," says Melodie van der Baan, CEO and co-founder of Max Retail, a company that helps independent retailers sell unused inventory.

Designer Clothing

While the average clothing item may be harder to sell as it gets older, there's always a market for designer clothing from previous seasons, Rachal says.

The most popular higher-end brands at ThredUp include Tory Burch, Johnny Was and Dooney & Burke. Many resale platforms, including PoshMark and eBay, require authentication for luxury items, such as pieces from Louis Vuitton or Gucci, so it's important to make sure that the items you're selling are genuine.

READ: 13 Items That Sell on eBay, Craigslist and Facebook Marketplace

Plus-Size Apparel

The plus-size brand Torrid is one of the top sellers on ThredUp, and stylish or trendy items in the plus-size category tend to sell quickly on the site, says Samantha Blumenthal, ThredUp's director of consumer communications.

"Plus-size is a historically underserved piece of the market in fashion, generally," Blumenthal says. "One of the really nice things about resale is that it democratizes fashion."

Midrange Clothing

While the price tags may be lower on midrange clothing than designer clothing, there is extremely strong demand for it. Popular brands in this category at ThredUp include Lululemon, Madewell and Everlane.

In general, you'll want to take bright, clear photographs of items that you're selling, and offer information about its provenance. While you may spend a bit of extra cash to get your products dry cleaned, buyers are more likely to purchase items with dry cleaning tags because it indicates that you've taken good care of the item, Rachal says.

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Handbags

Like sneakers, some shoppers consider vintage handbags collectible items, which can drive prices up, and there's always demand for trendy bags as well. The most popular bags at ThredUp include Fjallraven backpacks, Madewell leather crossbody bags and Lululemon belt bags.

"The attraction with bags is that there is no size involved," Rachal says. "So, it's easily accessible to everyone."

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