

MULTICHANNEL

Zoolander infiltrates high fashion as film premiere approaches

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Ben Stiller as Zoolander with Penelope Cruz for Vogue February 2016

By JEN KING

Italian fashion house Valentino and Vogue magazine agree: male model Derek Zoolander is so hot right now.

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While fictional, Derek Zoolander, played by actor and comedian Ben Stiller, is taking the high fashion industry by storm through catwalk appearances, in-store happenings and by landing the coveted cover of Vogue's February issue. In an industry sometimes known for its stodgy reputation, luxury fashion is joining the fun and embracing the comical nature of "Zoolander 2," the follow-up film to 2001's "Zoolander."

"When Ben Stiller and Owen Wilson appeared unannounced at the Valentino show for the first time in 2015, there was a sense of surprise, delight and self-effacing humor from the luxury fashion community, which often - just like Hollywood - takes itself a bit seriously," said Kristen Dillman, business development manager at [The O Group](#), New York.

"People view brands more as friends than businesses, nowadays, so when a storied luxury house like Valentino takes a step back from its carefully cultivated veneer to embrace popular culture it feels fresh and modern," she said. "The press surrounding the second Zoolander movie has mention of just about every of-the-moment fashion, hollywood and music celeb and will likely expose new audiences to the Valentino brand, growing its aspirational following and propping up its actual ready-to-wear business."

"Zoolander parodied the luxury fashion community the first time around, but this time the cast reads like a who's who of that world."

Zoolander 2 hits theaters in the United States on Feb. 12.

The appeal of Blue Steel

The original Zoolander film is considered to be a comedic classic as it pokes fun of the world of male models and offers a satirical look at the fashion industry at large. The film's protagonists, Mr. Stiller's Derek Zoolander and Hansel, played by Owen Wilson, are two dimwitted models who find themselves in precarious situations revolving around high fashion.

In March 2015, Paramount Pictures announced that Zoolander and Hansel would be returning to a nearby catwalk in the following year.

Given the popularity of the characters and the bevy of one-liners generated from the first film, anticipation for the sequel has resulted in a marketing effort blurring the lines of fiction and reality.

For example, Valentino's Paris Fashion Week presentation aligned with Paramount Picture's announcement of the upcoming film, giving the studio a fitting outlet to generate buzz. In a surprise appearance, Mr. Stiller and Mr. Wilson participated in the Valentino runway show, doing a walk-off in character.

After the last models had glided down the runway to an orchestral soundtrack, the music abruptly switched to The Human League's 1980s hit "Don't You Want Me." Mr. Stiller and Mr. Wilson walked down the runway, wearing serious "fashion" expressions, and audience cell phones flew up to capture video and photos.



Derek Zoolander and Hansel, during Valentino's fall/winter 2015 runway show

Keeping the interest on the fashion, the line up of models appeared again to walk the runway. Valentino also tweeted the details of what the actors were wearing ([see story](#)).

For Valentino, the addition of Zoolander and Hansel to its presentation allowed the brand's collection to stand out during a time when it's harder to be noticed due to the number of runway shows.

Paramount continued its relationship with Valentino after the news broke with a fashion shoot staged in front of the Eiffel Tower. While displaying Valentino's spring/summer 2015 men's collection, the photo shoot also gave the brand a chance to display its sense of humor.

Models Xiao Wen Ju and Tilda Lindstam joined Mr. Wilson and Mr. Stiller for the photo shoot. The two women are sporting the pre-fall 2015 Camuamour collection ([see story](#)).



Valentino fashion shoot with Derek Zoolander and Hansel

As the Zoolander 2 global premiere date nears, the male models visited Valentino's Roman flagship on Jan. 29. After a screening event in Rome with co-stars Will Ferrell and Justin Theroux, Mr. Stiller and Mr. Wilson, in-character, showed off their best model moves in Valentino's windows.

In the windows, Mr. Stiller broke out his serious model poses in a military green suit with butterflies and coordinating camouflage shirt while Mr. Wilson wore a lime green bomber and tropical button down as he posed using his signature martial arts moves.



Derek Zoolander and Hansel in Valentino's flagship windows

Per [WWD](#), the Valentino relationship to Zoolander 2 also extends behind-the-scenes with the fashion house collaborating with the film's costume designer Leesa Evans on a number of outfits seen in the film.

For kids who can't read good

Zoolander continued its high fashion treatment with a Vogue cover shoot featuring co-star Penelope Cruz for the title's February issue.

In an article promoting the title, Vogue expresses Zoolander's importance to the fashion industry, describing him as being "as recognizable as a head of state. As versed in world affairs as any common house cat. As handsome as Michelangelo's David. Or Victoria Beckham's David. Smells like – to tell the truth, Derek Zoolander smells like an orange mocha frappuccino."

Likewise, the fashion industry's marketing approach and consumer behavior has also changed drastically in the 15 years since the original film premiered, but, [Vogue's](#) satirical piece on Zoolander keeps readers laughing. It touches upon how today's supermodels such as Joan Smalls and Gigi Hadid were in "Chanel onesies" when Zoolander appeared in the "Merman" spot for male moisturizer, among other quips.

Vogue continued its lighthearted coverage of Zoolander's career with an email blast for the February issue. Article prompts seen in email included the comical pieces on how Zoolander predicted the future of fashion, nine beauty rules from the original film in GIF form and an overview of the Annie Leibovitz-shot fashion spread featured in the February issue.



Fashion shoot featuring Ben Stiller as Derek Zoolander and Penelope Cruz, Vogue February 2016

In a similar approach that tied a feature film to Vogue's content, the media company created a mockumentary to introduce readers to its Vogue Video Channel.

The debut film, "Vogue Presents The Minions" is a mockumentary with Vogue International editor Suzy Menkes as lead. Vogue was likely selected as the launch publication for the video due to the magazine's international standing

and status among the industry and fashion enthusiasts alike.

Ms. Menkes, keeping true to form, keeps the subject matter light for the Vogue Presents The Minions asking fashion industry greats about an unlikely topic, The Minions from Dreamworks' franchise children's movie, "Despicable Me." The yellow pill-shaped helpers, dressed in overalls and protective goggles for their eyes, assist Despicable Me's super villain Gru, voiced by actor Steve Carell, in his plots of world domination through behind-the-scenes antics.

In the 4 and a half minute segment, Ms. Menkes begins by saying, "What's the most famous name in fashion? Why, Vogue, of course! There is just one other name that every fashionista knows and loves, The Minions!" ([see story](#)).

While it is yet to be determined if Zoolander 2 will be a box office smash, the surrounding marketing has been sure to put the film top of mind.

"Whether or not this sequel will be a success is impossible to know," Ms. Dillman said. "The first Zoolander, despite the current impression, was not a notable commercial success.

"It's become part of the cultural zeitgeist over the last 15 years, primarily through cable and on-demand services, so perhaps that sense of connection felt by an entire generation will drive more immediate theatre sales this time around."

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