

RESEARCH

## Fashion industry seeks in-season relevancy through runway show innovation

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*Michael Kors fall/winter 2016 runway show*

By SARAH JONES

The Council of Fashion Designers of America's newly released report about the role of New York Fashion Week spotlights the industry-wide agreement on a need for change.

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In the report, conducted in partnership with Boston Consulting Group, the CFDA does not endorse a single solution, but rather lays out a number of possible answers identified by designers, media and retailers. As the fashion ecosystem searches for "in-season relevancy," each brand will need to decide for itself which updated format is best for them.

"Fashion week has evolved over the years with the influence of technology, but the format and function of fashion week has stayed the same," said Steven Kolb, president and CEO of the [CFDA](#).

"The study looks at how fashion week can use technology to its fullest advantage, and how designers can best maximize their resources to engage the customer," he said.

For the [report](#), BCG conducted interviews with more than 50 industry stakeholders, most of whom are based in the United States. These included designers, wholesalers and retailers, traditional press, new media, event vendors and international brands. Dozens more informal interviews also took place.

### Runway reboot

The debate surrounding the role of the fashion show today is escalating as more designers opt to shake up the runway format.

A rise in digital integration at fashion shows means that the audience at home and within the venue consumes and creates media instantaneously, but typically that feeling of instant gratification ends there, as consumers then wait months for the collection to become available for purchase. In a world where shopping is often just a click away, this delayed path from runway to retail can feel dated, prompting a number of brands to attempt to fix the format ([see story](#)).

The CFDA is playing an active role in repairing what it calls a "broken system," with the help of BCG.

As BCG interviewed the respondents, one theme was repeated over and over: in-season relevancy.



*Marc Jacobs spring/summer 2016 show*

Brands will still have to show their collections to buyers and press, but that does not mean that they are tied to the runway show.

A possible solution could be inviting press and buyers to an intimate appointment four to six months before collections are available, without what is deemed unnecessary "bells and whistles" of the runway show. These would enable stores to place orders, while giving media with long lead times the ability to include the collection in coverage, but brands would probably want to be careful about the release of images.

This method would allow time for production so brands could retain the same timeline for manufacturing.

One issue that brands currently struggle with is clothing's arrival to stores and online points of sale much earlier than the season for which it is intended for instance, fall apparel shipping in July. Consumers want to purchase merchandise when they actually need it, meaning garments linger at retail and are then marked down, creating a cycle that hurts bottom lines.

According to a report, this is a problem that needs to be addressed independently of the runway show schedule.

With the rise of the fashion show as a consumer event, rather than a trade presentation, it can be harder for brands to retain a feeling of newness through to the point in time when it reaches stores.

Respondents identified one option to combat this stagnation is hosting an in-season event. This could include shoppable looks or be more of an artistic interpretation of the collection. Consumers could be a part of the event through attendance, or brands could stage a digital campaign or short film to include them.

A number of brands, including Tom Ford and Burberry, have already announced plans to change up the format, planning to stage in-season shows to promote the collection that is currently available.



*Burberry runway show finale from spring/summer 2016*

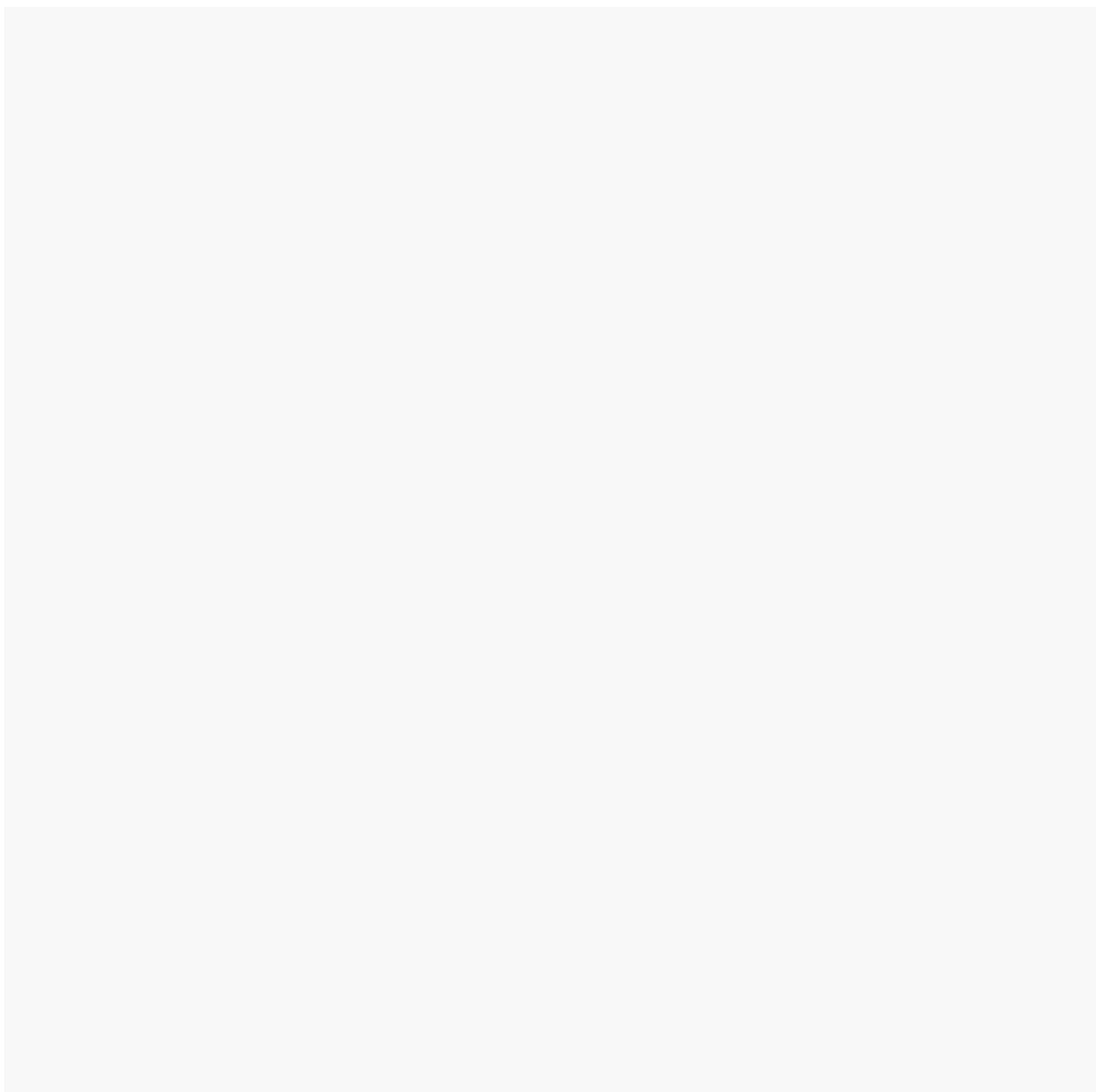
The creative process and the work of artisans take time, which the current schedule of pre-collections leaves little room for. Those interviewed for the report desire a time set aside between collections to give talent the room to breathe to avoid burnout.

For brands, this option within an in-season strategy could boost return on investment with more full-price sales. Retailers' merchandise would feel newer once it hits the sales floor, and media such as magazines would be able to deliver more timely content, which will also in turn make advertising more relevant.

"[In-season relevancy] puts product in front consumers at a time when they can actually buy it," Mr. Kolb said.

Other respondents suggested a hybrid model, in which brands would still show their runway shows at the end of the creative process, with the addition of a capsule collection immediately available. Based on BCG's findings, this is most preferred among luxury and affordable luxury brands.

Some luxury brands, such as Moschino, have been doing this for a number of seasons, while others including Mulberry and Prada, have just experimented with immediately available items for their fall/winter 2016 shows.



Prsente hier soir lors du fashion show la collection capsule @moschino est dj disponible l'Espace @marialuisa\_paris de votre magasin Printemps Mode Haussmann. #MFW16

A photo posted by Printemps Official (@printempsofficial) on Feb 26, 2016 at 2:51am PST

This solution keeps the fashion show as a central event for both consumers and trade.

Other proposed ideas include combining men's and women's shows, merging main and pre-collections or shifting the schedule for press appointments and activations to the timing typically reserved for pre-collections, December and June.

Fixing the format

Responding to the changing face of the runway show, retailers have also stepped outside the norm to give their consumers access to merchandise directly off its runway debut.

New York-based department store Bergdorf Goodman is capitalizing on consumers' desire for instant gratification with its "Right from the Runway" events series.

Beginning today, Bergdorf is inviting consumers to visit its store on set days to pre-order items seen during recent runway shows during New York Fashion Week. Consumers have expressed interest in being able to purchase runway pieces immediately, and many brands have developed ecommerce platforms to cater to this need, but an in-store component may sway interest even more ([see story](#)).

Other brands have chosen to eschew the physical runway show altogether, instead reaching consumers directly through digital efforts.

Tom Ford went against the grain by choosing not to stage a live runway presentation for its spring/summer 2016 collection ([see story](#)). Continuing its departure from runway tradition, the label hosted a small showcase for New York Fashion Week, showing that brands may toy with the format before settling on a singular strategy ([see story](#)).

"There is no one idea that will be most common, but all designers will benefit from looking at how they show their collections and being open to new ideas," Mr. Kolb said.

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