

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

True luxury is being able to shop on your own time: Net-A-Porter exec

June 10, 2016



Burberry's runway show in February 2016

By SARAH JONES

NEW YORK As the fashion show faces disruption, there is no single right solution, with each brand having to decide for itself how to proceed.

Subscribe to **Luxury Daily**
Plus: Just released
State of Luxury 2019 **Save \$246 ▶**

Panelists speaking during the "How Do You Solve a Problem Like Fashion Week" session at Fashion-Culture-Design on June 9 tackled the issues surrounding the existing fashion calendar, from the delay between runway and retail to fast fashion copycats. In an industry that thrives on creativity, is speeding up the timeframe from design to department store an attainable or on-brand goal?

"At the end of the day, I think companies have to do what they think is their authentic voice and how they want to portray their collection," said Andrew Rosen, CEO of Theory. "And they have a choice, and some will choose to show as they do now, some will disrupt it.

"I think we're right in the middle of a lot of disruption in our industry in total, and I think it's going to take a little time for all of this to work through the system," he said. "But I think it is perfectly appropriate to let designers do, companies do what they think is their best expression."

Instant gratification

Three to four decades ago, fashion shows were a private affair reserved only for press. With the rise of social media and live-streaming, the shows of today have become a spectacle that consumers get to experience along with the media, buyers, celebrities and bloggers seated at the main event.

This creativity does have a place, as it presents a unique opportunity for brand storytelling, but for buyers, the showroom visit is the key deciding factor. However, the typically more low-key pre-collections tend to take up more of a retailer's buying budget, anywhere from 65 to 75 percent of the yearly budget.

Sarah Rutson, vice president of global buying at Net-A-Porter, mentioned that a collection can be staged well, but not live up to its runway show when on a hanger, and a lackluster show may end up appealing when viewed close-up.



Armarium showroom

She added that the desire for immediately owning a collection that was once common among buyers has now been extended to consumers.

The months built in between runway shows and availability in-store present problems beyond consumer impatience. In the time it takes to produce a collection and get it to retailers, fast fashion brands can use the runway as inspiration for copycat designs, getting it to shoppers before the original designer.

In-season clothing has also been a big issue, as the department store calendar puts apparel on the sales floor months before the weather requires it. As an alternative to see now, buy now, brands may want to consider buy now, wear now, putting seasonally appropriate merchandise in front of consumers when they want it.

An in-season approach may also help to combat the deep discounting in retail, moving more merchandise at full-price.

Gary Wassner, CEO of Hildun, suggested a format that more similarly resembles France's, in which retailers can only hold sales during certain weeks of the year. However, in today's international ecommerce environment, where shoppers are not limited to one country for purchasing, this would require a worldwide agreement to be successful.

Assorted approaches

A range of solutions have been raised to fix what some consider a problem.

U.S. fashion label Michael Kors is limiting how its pre-spring/summer 2017 presentation will be viewed.

The brand has released a statement saying that it will only release five images from the collection, which will be available on the day of the show for editors to include in reviews and on social media. Michael Kors is included on the list of brands that have restructured their runway presentations to account for the see now, buy now trend ([see story](#)).

Rachna Shah, executive vice president of PR and managing director of digital at KCD Worldwide, says that brands have more of a chance at keeping shares and coverage limited for presentations than they do for large runway shows.



Michael Kors fall/winter 2016 runway show

Theory's Mr. Rosen said that he does not see a one size fits all solution. Instead, designers and labels will have to experiment and find the approach that works for them, but he is confident that in time brands will arrive at better formats.

This echoes the optimism yet uncertainty in the Council of Fashion Designers of America's newly released report about the role of New York Fashion Week, which spotlighted the industry-wide agreement on a need for change.

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 ([see story](#)).

The way in which fashion is being disrupted now is similar to the ways in which other creative fields have had to adjust to the changes in consumption habits. However, the fashion calendar puts unique pressure on its creatives.

As the pace of fashion has also sped up, designers are expected to produce highly creative collections and spectacular shows in increments of a couple of months.

This pressure has led to short tenures for many creative directors, as the non-stop nature of the fashion calendar leaves them no time to breathe.

"You can't push a creative soul to the extremes without something breaking," Net-A-Porter's Ms. Rutson said.

© 2020 Napean LLC. All rights reserved.

Luxury Daily is published each business day. Thank you for reading us. Your [feedback](#) is welcome.