

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

## Rebecca Minkoff sees store expansion, manufacturing outsourcing for China, Europe push

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*Rebecca Minkoff is cofounder and CEO of eponymous apparel and accessories brand. Photograph by Paul Maffi*

By A LUXURY DAILY COLUMNIST

By **Daniel Hodges**

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CANNES, France Rebecca Minkoff moved to New York as an ambitious eighteen-year-old aspiring designer. Just a few years later, her modified T-shirt using the "I Love NY" logo was an immediate hit when television actress Jenna Elfman wore it for an appearance on "The Tonight Show."

From 2005 to 2009, Ms. Minkoff designed handbags with a "downtown romantic" look the first of which became known as the Morning After Bag, or M.A.B.

In 2009, the company introduced its first ready-to-wear collection, featuring "playful and subtly edgy" handbags, accessories, footwear and apparel for young women.

On a roll

While staying true to the "downtown, rock 'n' roll roots" of its inception, the brand is now distributed worldwide in more than 900 stores, with four domestic bricks-and-mortar stores and nine international locations.

Ms. Minkoff is one of the rare company founders who does not have to do everything herself. She is able to identify talent and to delegate to others and keep her focus on the big picture, which in her case means engaging with customers in ever-evolving ways.

**Rebecca Minkoff** the brand and the individual has long been known for its media-savvy approach to customers.

As an early adopter of social media to interact with her clientele, Ms. Minkoff was once told that she was "dirtying" the brand with her unorthodox at the time methods.

Now, these are the tools more and more companies are using to incorporate social values and connect with consumers on multiple levels.

In its stores, Rebecca Minkoff uses interactive digital displays to provide an extraordinary shopping experience.

For example, fitting rooms allow customers to request a different size of a garment, while an application facilitates purchases directly from the fitting room. Below, Ms. Minkoff briefly shares some of the newest ways that she is reaching out to expand that connection.

At her first visit to the **Cannes Lions** advertising festival this week in the French Riviera resort of Cannes, Ms. Minkoff's presentation topic is modern brand building, and she will no doubt divulge more of the insights that allow her to connect so effectively with her core customer.

How do you define your role as founder surrounded by professional management?

I cofounded Rebecca Minkoff 13 years ago with my brother Uri.

The first five years we were doing business on our own. At year five, we hired a management professional, which made all the difference in the world.

I was making a \$300-a-week salary at the time, and my brother and I were just getting by. Hiring a true expert really changed everything.

What are your plans for this year and next for your brand?

Our plans for next year include expanding our European business and Asia business, especially our footprint in China.

We are opening up new stores and we are manufacturing in China and Europe to keep up with the huge demand for our product.

We decided to hire a partner in both China and in Europe. We will be handling the design, and they'll be handling the manufacturing. We think that's the best way to go forward.



*A Rebecca Minkoff bag. Image credit: Rebecca Minkoff*

How is your customer evolving in her shopping behavior?

We designed our platform for [a] mobile-first experience, but beyond that, we support the voice of women.

We have created fireside chats that provide something meaningful for women. The fireside chats are yielding good results.

What role does marketing play in fashion?

We provide customization in a couple ways.

The Rebecca Minkoff Web site features "RM Superwomen," portraits shot by Sakara Life creative director Lianna Tarantin.

We're including everyone from leaders of The Women's March to influencers to artists and organizers.

We're trying to capture today's new and emerging era of feminist activism to inspire and empower our customers.



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