

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Diane von Furstenberg's Asia-Pacific head of biz dev on Shanghai Fashion Week

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Diane von Furstenberg livestream at Shanghai Fashion Week. Image credit: Diane von Furstenberg, Tmall

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Shanghai Fashion Week, **initially pushed back** due to COVID-19, joined forces with Tmall to put on a fully livestreamed **virtual fashion week**.

Opening showcases on the first day clocked 2.5 million views, according to Alibaba Group's brand-focused ecommerce platform. Views totaled 11 million for the event and helped generate over RMB20 million (\$2.82 million) in gross merchandise volume.

Luxury fashion label Diane von Furstenberg, best known for its signature wrap dress, was one of the brands that moved its presentations online.

I spoke with Gabby Hirata, DVF's head of business development for Asia-Pacific, to learn more about the New York-based label's experience in preparing for the show and bringing its designs from the catwalk onto the "cloud."

This edition of Shanghai Fashion Week was unconventional and likely the world's first fashion-week event to livestream its entire roster of runway shows. Why did Diane von Furstenberg decide to participate?

Alibaba has a huge impact on the digital retail landscape in China. It provides an effective platform for brands like DVF to serve Chinese customers around the clock. It also gives us dynamic opportunities to tell the story of DVF to people who are not yet familiar with the brand.

When we learned about the opportunity to be part of the digital Shanghai Fashion Week, we knew instantly that we should participate because, as a brand, we need to constantly innovate in order to create a robust DVF digital community. Alibaba has been crucial in that endeavor.

When we first soft-launched our **Tmall flagship store** in September 2019, we started with 10,000 fans. By March, we saw close to 300,000 fans. And this is only the beginning for us to tell the story of **women in charge**.

Are you pleased with how the event went overall?

Yes, we were amazed by how passionate the audience was, especially during our livestreaming segment. We saw so

many compliments rolling on the screen for how flattering the wrap dresses and our spring prints were. We have not seen such an effective way to gather customer feedback within such a short time.



Diane von Furstenberg Asia-Pacific head of business development Gabby Hirata working on a livestream shoot in New York. Image credit: Diane von Furstenberg

How did you prepare? Did you have to conceptualize a show differently for online?

The turnaround time was extremely tight. The preparation schedule also coincided with the breakout of COVID-19 in New York, so everyone worked from home. Despite all the logistical challenges, Diane wanted to send a personal message to the digital Chinese community.

Given what we are experiencing in the U.S., it is imperative for us to stay hopeful, and more focused than ever, on staying connected with our customers and communities. We recorded this message directly from Diane and included it in a pre-show video that streamed the day before our show.

The most-exciting thing about conceptualizing a digital show is that the audience is not the selected few, but everyone. We designed the show to be instantly understandable, with clear lighting and wearability in mind.

What surprised you the most about going from offline to an online fashion show?

The interactive component is the most exciting and surprising part of a digital fashion show.

The traditional offline runway is one-way communication, where brands talk to the audience.

An online fashion show that is livestreamed on Alibaba's platform allows for two-way communication, where the brand and the audience can talk to each other.

Anyone who is watching can type a comment, and it is instantly viewable to anyone, including us, which is very exciting and empowering.

Do you think this livestreamed form of fashion week could be a way of the future?

The online fashion week is a trend to stay because behaviors have fundamentally changed after COVID-19. It has become a natural habit to not only buy, but also learn, online.

For a legacy brand like DVF, we will accelerate our digital transformation to lead this future.



Label founder Diane von Furstenberg at a luncheon celebrating women in charge. Photo by Craig Barritt/Getty Images for Diane von Furstenberg

How important is the China market for DVF? Is there anything that sets Chinese consumers apart from other regions?

China has a special place in Diane's heart. Her books have been published in Chinese, and she has launched exhibitions in China.

Diane has a personal Weibo account and always stays connected not only with her close friends in China, but the wider online Chinese community.

We have a very ambitious vision for where DVF should be in China. The wrap dress is so versatile: You can wear it in the morning, all the way through the evening at work, then go on a date. You can wear it to drop off your kid in the morning and attend a meeting right after. Most importantly, it is quintessentially feminine.

Functionality and femininity are two elements that are particularly indispensable for Chinese women. We want to help Chinese women become the women they always wanted to be, whether that's an executive or a stay-at-home mother.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the normal ways of doing business. Besides bringing your Shanghai Fashion Week showcase online, how else has DVF adjusted plans under current circumstances?

In addition to participating in various activations with Alibaba, we are also actively consolidating and strategizing DVF's overall digital presence across different platforms.

Each social media channel serves a slightly different audience and purpose. How to digitally tell a compelling story about DVF and women empowerment to these different audiences has become a priority goal for us this year, especially after COVID-19.

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