

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

## NYFW's virtual events are not one-size-fits-all

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Most fashion presentations are staying virtual for this iteration of NYFW. Image credit: NYFW

By KATIE TAMOLA

With a full-fledged New York Fashion Week out of the question, brands continue to look for ways to make digital presentations more engaging.

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Continuing to expand digital presences and acknowledging COVID-19 restrictions, many brands will be hosting virtual events this week. Fashion labels are continually producing innovative ways to foster relationships with consumers who may not feel comfortable engaging in in-person events, shopping or activities.

"Virtual events are a way of adapting to the space we are in now," said Sarah Gargano, president/CEO of **Sarah Gargano Communications**, New York. "They are shaping us to see what the future of PR can be."

### Going and staying digital

Since COVID-19 emerged, different brands are experimenting with different routes, with some turning to technology and others holding socially-distanced events.

NYFW will feature events from Feb. 14 to Feb. 17. Badgley Mischka, Markarian and Rodarte are among the digital participants, while labels including Michael Kors, Ralph Lauren and Marc Jacobs are not participating.

Badgley Mischka is currently sporting a virtual countdown to the line reveal, featuring sketches of the products on its website.

NYFW will primarily host digital events, while designers Jason Wu and Rebecca Minkoff are both hosting in-person socially-distant fashion shows.

Mr. Wu's show was held on Feb. 14 in front of an appointment-only audience. Ms. Minkoff's show will be held at the Spring Studios Terrace on Feb. 16, and is limited to 16 guests at a time with required temperature checks and face masks.



[View this post on Instagram](#)

A post shared by Fashion Week (@fashionweek)

*The Jason Wu fall/winter 2021 show was held in front of a small audience*

Given the pandemic, brands have continued to expand their virtual presences in order to keep connecting with consumers. NYFW virtual events are not one size fits all, with events including livestreaming, launches on websites, virtual flipbooks and more.

An opportunity has arisen for brands to create alternative solutions for now and in the future. Rather than simply recreating an event for an online audience, with a little thinking outside the box, they can be restructured entirely, ensuring consumers remain engaged and brands relevant ([see story](#)).

Each presentation for NYFW 2021 can be viewed on the Council of Fashion Designers of America's digital platform, [Runway360](#), or IMG's [NYFW.com](#).

Other luxury labels, including Gabriela Hearst and Oscar de la Renta, will show their own fall/winter 2021 collections in the coming weeks.

Dating back to 2020, New York-based designer Michael Kors was part of a small group of designers and labels who opted out of New York Fashion Week. Instead, Mr. Kors presented his spring/summer 2021 collection in mid-October through the brand's social and digital platforms, encouraging a shift towards a slower-pace, two-show fashion calendar ([see story](#)).

Fashion weeks in other cities are facing similar challenges and opportunities.

The [British Fashion Council](#) announced that the next iteration of London Fashion Week will stay virtual, in light of the evolving coronavirus crisis. Running from Feb. 19 to Feb. 23, London Fashion Week will be a digital-first event with scaled back in-person events ([see story](#)).



*Alma Jodorowsky watches Chanel's socially-distanced spring/summer 2021 haute couture show. Image credit: Chanel*

Some fashion houses, such as Chanel, have adapted their strategy as the pandemic evolves.

Last year, Chanel held several virtual fashion shows. For one show, Chanel teased three videos and four photographs on its Instagram page to promote the virtual event showcasing its new Haute Couture line ([see story](#)).

For Paris Couture Week in January, several Chanel ambassadors filmed a roundtable discussion. While maintaining appropriate distance due to COVID-19 restrictions, the women discussed the spring/summer 2021 haute couture show, as well as the care and authenticity that Chanel weaves into each of its products and how it feels to wear the brand ([see story](#)).

#### Outside of the box

Brands are continuing to think outside of the box and forming partnerships to broaden their reach. Methods include social media presence as well as offering consumers insights into brand culture.

As a significant number of consumers remain hesitant to venture into physical stores for retail therapy, brands are faced with the challenge of engaging consumers exclusively through digital channels. Luxury brands had already begun experimenting with virtual reality, augmented reality (AR) and digital avatars and influencers ([see story](#)).

Italian fashion label Gucci is partnering with social app Zepeto in its latest gaming-centric push to engage consumers.

The collaboration will allow users to dress their Zepeto 3-D avatars in pieces from Gucci's latest collections. More luxury brands have been teaming with games and other interactive platforms to expand their brand reach ([see story](#)).

Brands are continuing to gauge what works for them, determining which forms of technology, socially-distanced events and storytelling will continue to attract consumers.

Ms. Gargano, whose PR firm works with faux fur line Maison Atia, argues that it is important to elevate the digital experience.

"We find it is effective in gathering together virtually while sharing our experiences with physical items we ship beforehand to the attendees," Ms. Gargano said. "We go the extra mile to send previous coverage, lookbooks and additional information so the editors feel encouraged to share their experiences with their audience."