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Are fashion designers the new branding tool?

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By ERIN SHEA

Many fashion designers are moving into the spotlight by showing off other talents, but how much does this additional exposure really help a brand?

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Fashion designer and CFDA president Diane von Furstenberg could possibly extend her brand's exposure with a new advice column on New York magazine's fashion site The Cut. Likewise, many other designers such as Marc Jacobs and Karl Lagerfeld have entered into the spotlight for talents besides fashion, but only certain efforts may extend a brand's reach.

"Fashion designers are their brands," said Rony Zeidan, president and creative director at **RO New York**. "There is a risk on trying to be a personality as that opens you to criticism in the same way as Hollywood celebrities get scrutinized for their every move.

"My advice is to remain in the shadow of your brand and speak through the brand," he said.

Personal branding

Ms. von Furstenberg's column first ran Feb. 28 on The Cut's Web site, asking readers to submit new questions for the next edition.

The introduction of the column reads, “Diane von Furstenberg will now answer your quandaries for The Cut.” Then it asks readers to submit questions to askthecut@nymag.com.

The first column offers two questions, one about career advice and another about dating advice.



2/28/13 at 11:03 AM

Dear Diane Von Furstenberg: Introducing Our New Advice Column

BY DIANE VON FURSTENBERG

Diane Von Furstenberg will now be solving your quandaries for the Cut. To submit a question, e-mail askthecut@nymag.com.

Dear Diane: How should I behave on a first date?

Do NOT think of it as a date. Enjoy meeting a new person, find out who that person is. Discover. Put them at ease, create intimacy. Intimacy does not mean going to bed with someone. Intimacy is paying attention. Pay attention to the person. Don't think "he is not right for me." He may not be right for you and become a friend. Discover him and let him discover you. Have no expectation except in meeting someone new. The rest will happen or not. But it is always a good idea to surprise! When Barry asked me out to dinner for the first time 37 years ago, I prepared a

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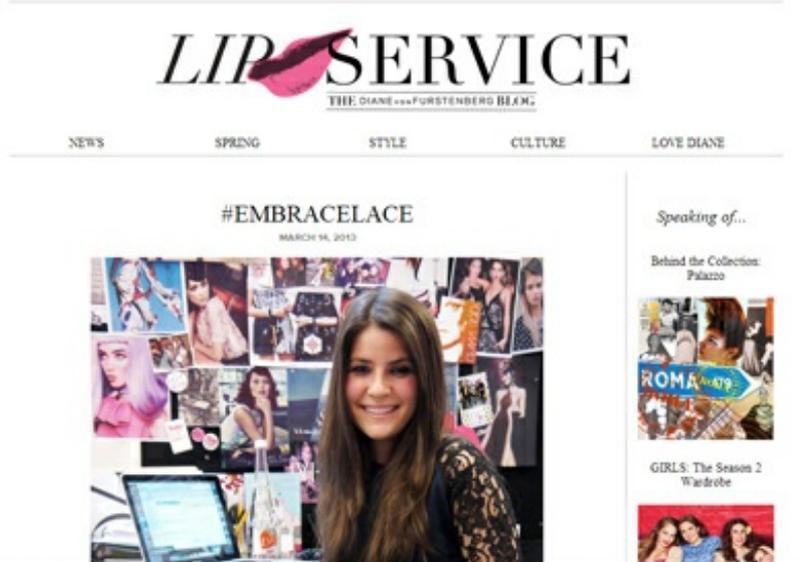
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Diane von Furstenberg's column

Below the two questions is a link to the Diane von Furstenberg brand blog, Lip Service.



LIP SERVICE
THE DIANE VON FURSTENBERG BLOG

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The link to the blog could help it gain more followers.

“This method allows for new connectivity activating and creating a dialogue with a whole

new audience,” Mr. Zeidan said.

“Growing a brand is about gaining new followers, and this strategy does just that,” he said.

Since the column is running on The Cut, the audience is likely aware of Ms. von Furstenberg and her brand, so the extra impact it may have on the Diane von Furstenberg label may be minimal.

However, the column can help the brand further connect with its target consumer.

“The Diane von Furstenberg audience might already be followers of The Cut, which is a good indication that she is strengthening the bond for the brand,” Mr. Zeidan said.

“It is a great way for Diane von Furstenberg to connect with that consumer and always remain on the pulse of the new generation of urban, smart, worldly [consumers] discerning in their news outlet who choose to follow The Cut for the lifestyle it adds,” he said.

Connecting with consumers in this way through an edited medium is also a safe investment for Ms. von Furstenberg.

“This is a controlled environment, so we should not expect too many outlandish questions or answers,” said Chris Ramey, president of [Affluent Insights](#), Miami.

“It is the perfect scripted vehicle,” he said. “This particular strategy would not work for many fashion designers – they are too edgy or off the wall.

“Ms. von Furstenberg relates well to her best prospects and it allows her to elevate the brand on an intellectual level as well as on a fashion basis.”

Fashion overachievers

Other designers have also been pushing their own personal branding in creative areas outside of the fashion world.

For instance, designer Marc Jacobs is making his acting debut and is propelling his own personal brand forward, but the move will not do much for Louis Vuitton – where he is creative chief – or his eponymous fashion label.

Mr. Jacobs will play a minor role in a new thriller film titled “Disconnect” that opens April 12. This could help boost Mr. Jacobs’ personal celebrity status since he is not widely known outside of the fashion world ([see story](#)).

Also, British automaker Rolls-Royce Motor Cars gained visibility through a new exhibit in its “Icons of Art” series that featured photographs by Chanel creative director Karl Lagerfeld.

The exhibit titled “A Different View” portrays the design elements of Rolls-Royce and was on display at the Rolls-Royce headquarters in Goodwood, West Sussex, England ([see story](#)).

Although designers can act as an extension of their brands, they have to retain balance

and resonate with their target consumers.

“It is not about being a strong individual, it is about a celebrity whose message resonates with their best clients,” Mr. Ramey said.

“It is often about a balance of strong versus connectivity, if you are too strong you are liable to turn off a consumer,” he said.

“At the same time, you have to have game.”

However, unlike other endeavors, Ms. von Furstenberg’s column as an extension of her own personality is what will help sell the column and in turn make her brand more relatable.

“Creating brand apostles is much easier when you have humanized the brand,” Mr. Ramey said.

“In this case, Ms. von Furstenberg plays herself well,” he said.

Final take

Erin Shea, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

Embedded Video: <http://www.youtube.com/embed/U5dQEEKqQi0?rel=0>

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