

ORGANIZING A FASHION SHOW

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The described situations don't represent a behavior rule and the authors don't want to give opinions about these situations and actions. This case has be written to entice a discussion.

“The new queens of Africa, up-to-date and dynamic women, wrapped in flimsy and fluttering clothing. Meters and meters of chiffon. Great dress making ability. Soft necklines and bare backs. Fluid lines and sensual lengths. Precious and unique is the long dress made with 200.000 tiny gold stones.

Knee-length dresses, embroidered in crystal, in the green tones of agave and in the yellow ones of diamonds. A modern and free Africa, patron of her own prosperousness and no more savagely exploited. Accessories that exalt the beauty and materials of a strong and contrasted land. Straw bags, wooden belts and metal rings. Regal Masai necklaces worn bravely with dresses made of black crystal nets. Desire of freedom, a cry of revenge, happiness of living a new life, the one once denied by the powerful. Extremely high heels. Breath taking. Made with teak colored wood, mahogany, ebony. Also sandals in white maple, pleated straw and old cartridges.

Everything wrapped in the red warm colors of the earth, the yellow of the savannah, the deep blue of the sky. “My Africa, a free Africa!”¹

This is a typical example of how a fashion show is thought up and described: a unique event, sensational, able to strike the spectators.

Each fashion show is a massive communication event, that introduces emerging stylists, new designer labels, but most of all, keeps consumers interested in the big labels, that always present new fashion routes.

The objective of launching trends and of communicating the peculiarity of a brand is greater than commercializing single collections or a single piece of clothing.

When the first fashion shows started in Italy, in Milan during the seventies, the objectives were different: the main purpose of the show was to sell collections and put most of the items into production (more or less 50% of the items were then produced).

After a period in which fashion shows were only aimed at shocking the public, through emphasis on the broadness and the mediatic power of big brand names, lately, commercial purposes are being rediscovered, and, maybe due to the economic situation that made fashion business less brilliant, the number of fashion shows that neglect commercial purpose has diminished.

It is certain by now that a fashion show has to be principally a mediatic event: inviting famous testimonials and putting celebrities that are lent by show-biz to the fashion business on the catwalk can determine the success or the flop of a fashion show.

¹ Text taken from www.sfilate.it used to present the Gai Mattiolo fashion show in Paris.

During the organization of a fashion show it is simple to understand the importance of artistic and technical aspects, but they are not the only ones to consider: the care for details can turn a decent show into a successful event.

Here are a few elements that show the transformation of a fashion company's idea into a concrete event².

The time lapse in which a great fashion company organizes a fashion show is undefined, because there are a series of continuative activities to check upon during the whole year, but have to be lead into a "final rush" in order to bring the two annual collections on the catwalk at a certain time of the year. To be able to do this it is necessary to delegate some activities to external professionals, still keeping control of the whole project and of the "core" internal activities.

The G&B company, big label of Italian Style in the world, just after the conclusion of the woman's fashion show in March, is already preparing for the woman's fashion show in September³.

Firstly it is important to decide the theme of the fashion show and, to do this, it is fundamental to start from the main items of the collection (that meanwhile will be created during the organization of the fashion event).

In this company, the role of the fashion designer, who has been leading the organization to the peak of international fashion, is fundamental.

This charismatic person's creativity is emphasized by the artistic director, who deals totally with the strategic management of the brand and of the company's communication.

The responsibility of choosing the theme of the collection is given to the fashion designer, who will offer the artistic director all the necessary elements to decide upon the next fashion show and , according to this choice, every activity will take a certain direction.

In a series of preliminary meetings the fashion designer and the artistic director will decide upon the theme of the fashion show, a director will be chosen and will be given full responsibility for the management of ordinary activities linked to realization of the event. A maximum budget will be pre-arranged in order to be approved by the board of directors. Only after its authorization it is possible to start the project officially. (Enclosure 1)⁴

It is also because of this, that the activities linked to organization have to start well in advance: often, activities that have to do with the concrete creation of the initial ideas need time, and, very frequently, a variation in the budget is necessary before the start of the project, that lasts overall six months.

² *The data given by the case, even though they are close to reality, don't refer to any true event and have been used to facilitate the comprehension of methods and tools proposed during the course.*

³ *The woman collections, in Italy, happen to be twice a year in September and March.*

⁴ *The Enclosure shows notes taken by the artistic director during one of the preliminary briefs and offers the necessary elements to analyze the case.*

It is the beginning of a new planning phase in which the event date is set, a detailed budget is written (but has to be approved by the board of directors once again) and different activities are programmed in order to reach the date of the event with a successful product.

One of the main worries of the director, to guarantee a successful fashion show is to find (after choosing between a few alternatives proposed during the first meetings) the right location for the event.

At this phase the artistic director and the fashion designer's support is really important because they can express their opinion about the possibility of realizing the director's ideas in the different locations. It is true there are many places where a fashion show could be held, but in the fashion show period the most prestigious locations are in great demand.

After a careful analysis of the alternatives, the director checks the availability of the chosen location and signs a location contract.

The company, as usual, has a four-day rent contract, so there will be enough time to expose whatever is necessary for the fashion show and to dismantle it at the end of the event.

Once the location is chosen, the director, with the artistic director's support, and also of the people who deal with the communication and the commercial side of the company, has to decide upon the display: such as internal decor, the position of the catwalk, the backstage, the public area, lighting, sound system and scenography.

These activities are in charge of outsourcing societies.

Different briefs about the light disposition, about the music, about the scenography and about the camera action will be made in front of the artistic director, of the director, of the designer and the technicians of the outsourcing societies.

The choice of the suppliers is a fundamental activity, as their careless job could create a series of inconveniences with irreparable effects.

The director's assistants, therefore, start sifting a few outsourcing societies in alternative, ask for an estimate and present the compared alternatives to the director, leaving the last choice and the signing of the contract up to him.

The Media and P.R. office also has a key role in the organization: an event is successful not only because of its organization, but also because of the way it's promoted, which means it depends even on the number and standard of the people who participate.

Towards the beginning of the event, the media and P.R. office activities get more and more phrenetic: they have to prepare and send press folders (the company has always used precious materials and innovative design to realize them), choose the gadgets to offer the public, to accredit journalists and get in contact with the guests.

A good P.R office, though, doesn't only have to work when the event is about to start, but has to continue with its activities in order to keep its contacts interested and find new ones.

An important activity is what is called "Sitting", which is often undervalued during the organization of such an event. The capability of reserving certain seats for certain celebrities can make an event successful.

These choices are made in order to conciliate the double aim of the fashion show: create a mediatic effect and promote the collection presented at the show so the best places are given to VIPs and journalists but also to current and potential buyers.

As well as sitting, there is an intensive communication activity, that consists in choosing the guests, creating the invitations (coordinated by the artistic director) which have to be done according to the theme and the mood of the fashion show. After having sent them the guest are finally re-called to be sure they will be present at the show and during the final match in their seats.

This is the procedure already tested by the company: an early invitation is sent (in a "save the date" electronic format) about 40 days before the fashion show (to make sure the guest's agenda is booked), later, the official invitation is sent about ten days before the event; this invitation is often followed by a telephonic recall.

Special attention is given to the press and media invitations because only through them an event like this one can be communicated to the public.

It is impossible, when dealing with a fashion show, not to talk about models and the catwalk.

Casting is the main activity of the fashion show and usually, in the G&B company, it consists of different phases.

In the first phase the criteria that determines the choice of the models is decided, according to the items, the theme, the setting and the target the show is directed to. During this activity the fashion designer's precised indications are followed to the letter. It is also true that the artistic director and director, having shared the same ideas with him, will agree with his choices.

There are also a few model recruiting agencies the company cooperates with continuously: after telling them the date of the event, the number of models needed and the chosen characteristics, the agencies provide the company with a series of models that follow the standards required a few days before the event.

During the last phase, the designer and his staff have a proper casting and choose between the models sent by the agencies and employ a slightly higher number of girls in case a few decide to leave at the last minute.

Casting is done about ten days before the event and it is then the contracts are signed, a few are even modified at the last minute. It is important for a company to deal with reliable agencies, because the activities linked to model recruiting are often based on reliance between the promoting organization of the event and the different agencies.

According to the number of models and the number of changes during the show, the costumiers are employed to help the models change their clothes.

Fitting consists in associating an item to a single model: with this choice it is possible to see what the fashion show will be like and to plan a few last minute touches on the clothes. This activity is supervised by the designer. In this phase polaroids of the models with different clothes on are taken and they will help him to choose the right combinations.

The coordination of clothing, the decision of the order of apparition according to the music, the creation of a coreography, the hairstyles, the make up, are done just before the start of the show, but it is necessary to rehearsal, in case there are variations to make before the show.

It is also indispensable to name a few services provided by the outsourcing societies, that complete the fashion show product. It is necessary to have security during the event, hostesses that accompany the guests to their seat, photographers, cameramen and a catering service for the after-show.

Security service is provided by special agencies according to the location, the guest numbers, the presence of celebrities and famous models.

The photographers and cameramen are chosen by the director, who relies on his professional skills in that field.

It is easy to find agencies that provide hostesses and catering services, but it is difficult to find reliable organizations that are able to offer high level service, so the company ends up relying on their usual trustworthy agencies, that can guarantee good quality services and are more likely to accept last minute changes.

The G&B company for the last few years has chosen a society that sponsorizes big hairstyling and beauty product brands for the models' make up and hairstyle. This is because a co-marketing activity can diminish the expenses linked to this activity.

Usually there is a DJ, who creates the sound track for the fashion show.

There is a lot of confusion in the company before the event: the different coordinators run from an office to the other, because the show is about to start and there are still lots of things to do.

Often, when the technicians build the structures and deal with the set up, the services and the catwalk, it seems there is time for nothing, but, magically, the day of the event everything seems perfect, the guests arrive, they are seated, the lights go down and the show begins...

It is indispensable to undertake all these activities perfectly to reach a good result, but, unfortunately, it is not enough to guarantee the success of a fashion show that is also made of emotions and sensations that can't be programmed before hand.

A successful fashion show can motivate the supervision of the equipment dismantlement the night after the show, the arrangement of the activities the next morning, the annotations of what went well and what can be better in the next fashion show.

Enclosure 1

September woman fashion show

Board of directors expected for 31/3

500 guests

Budget⁵

Location rent 40k⁶ €

Staging: lights, sound system and scenography 70k

Video + photo (Studio xxx) 5k

Direction 40k

Makeup 3000€ in co-marketing with XXX

Security service (aprox. 20 people) 2500€

Hostess 10x 150 € each

Costumiers each 25 x 100€

Catering 15k

Press: precious folder + gadgets 9 €+ 2€ x invitation

Mailing 2000 invitations

Models ??? (Costs according to the models have to be found out by the students)

⁵ Even though the Project Management methods require the full allocation of the project's costs, the company has chosen not to allocate on the project the costs that have to do with the permanent regular staff.

⁶ K=1000 €

Enclosure 2

The timing of the project⁷:

ACTIVITY	TIME
Ideation	3 weeks
Location	25 days
Planning	10 days
Casting	1 week
Choreographies, Make-up and hair styling, fittings	10 days
Rehearsal	1 day
Media and P.R office	4 months
Activities linked to the event	4 days
Organization of the services	15 days

⁷The elements written in the chart are purely indicative and are related to macro groups of activities that have to be split up, according to the management necessities of the project, in easily manageable Work Packages.