

The Fashion Blogosphere - A New Era Of Publicity

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The internet is becoming one of the most important channels for fashion retailers, with global internet clothing and footwear sales predicted to post a current value CAGR of 9% over 2010-2015.

Savvy retailers are using fashion blogs to reinforce the popularity of the internet in fashion and gain publicity for their brands. In fact, blogs now form a key part of the marketing and PR strategies of the most forward thinking fashion companies.

Bloggers have become a highly effective publicity tool

Fashion blogs enable retailers to reach a much wider consumer base and target people who may not have otherwise had an interest in or been aware of their brand.

Clever retailers are engaging bloggers through inviting them to press evenings alongside celebrities and other important fashion industry individuals.

For example, in 2009, Arcadia's Evans brand invited bloggers to preview its new collection, a celebrity collaboration with singer Beth Ditto.

Those on the guest list included some of the most popular fashion bloggers such as Susie Bubble in addition to individuals with popular blogs aimed at Evan's plus sized market such as Jeanie Annan-Lewin.

Bloggers at such events usually upload photos during or immediately after the event with their thoughts and this in turn invites comments from their numerous followers.

Therefore, engaging with bloggers is a very clever way of connecting with consumers and provoking discussion about a fashion brand or new collection.

Internationally renowned bloggers such as 14-year-old Tavi Gevinson have even been invited to sit in the front row during key fashion weeks for the likes of Christian Dior. The child prodigy blogger was also invited to collaborate with luxury brand Rodarte to present its collection through her blog.

The sites of the most popular bloggers can get several thousand hits per day and have hundreds of followers, which explains why retailers cannot ignore this fairly recent phenomenon. Some retailers are investing as much time and effort in bloggers as they are in traditional PR and marketing activities.

For example, in 2009, Gap collaborated with blogger and illustrator Garance Doré on a collection sold through a pop-up store on Carnaby Street to celebrate its 40th birthday. Another 'celebrity' blogger, Bryanboy, used Twitter to hint that he will soon be working on a project with H&M.

Parent company H&M has a strong focus on blogs at the moment as it recently commissioned blogger Susie Bubble to do the visual merchandising for a number of its COS stores in London after she expressed her love of the brand on her blog.

This initiative enabled COS to showcase its clothes through pictures of the display on Stylebubble and win over her fans, particularly with the slogan 'Susie Bubble of Stylebubble loves COS and we love Susie' on the windows.

Affiliate marketing a worthwhile investment

Affiliate networks allow anyone with a website to register and feature links from retailers on their site. If visitors to the site click on the link and subsequently make a purchase the site owner will earn commission.

Through affiliate networks blogs can now translate directly into additional sales for fashion brands rather than simply offering increased publicity. This makes popular bloggers even more attractive to clothing and footwear retailers.

Both mass-market and high-end fashion brands are using affiliate marketing, with both luxury retailer NET-A-PORTER and sporty brand American Apparel featured on popular street style blog The Sartorialist.

The fact that all bloggers can sign up to affiliate networks such as Skimlinks to have retailer links on their site may pose a threat to the image of a retailer as they have no control over who signs up.

Many people assume that bloggers with links on their website have been officially endorsed by retailers but this is not

necessarily the case.

However, since bloggers are using the affiliate network to try and make money they are unlikely to cause any significant harm to a brand. The majority of leading retailers such as ASOS promote their affiliate network partners on their website.

Affiliate networks offer a newer form of marketing that can appeal to a much wider audience than customary advertising through magazines for example.

However, retailers must try to ensure that links to their websites are featured on blogs with high traffic to increase the click-to-sale ratio, especially considering that signing up to an affiliate network can cost a retailer up to Â£5,000 to set up and then Â£500 per month.

Bloggers have instigated significant change in the fashion industry over the past few years and the balance of power has shifted from the brands to the consumer.

Consumer opinion has become increasingly important and bloggers offer a platform for ordinary people to publicise their passions and aversions.

Whilst it may seem like a fad to some, brands which have worked alongside bloggers are reaping huge benefits and this is likely to prompt more retailers to follow suite in the near and mid-term future.

Analyst Insight by Zaena Miller

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