

A NEW DIRECTION FOR THE RUNWAY: UP. POP-UP.

0 COMMENTS



The **use of fashion weeks and runways** has been discussed a lot this New York Fashion Week. There's a prevailing sense that these institutions and concepts are being followed less because they work, but out of tradition. What was once solely an 'industry' event has increasingly become more visible to and geared towards consumers. The ways, the times and the locations of these showcases don't always seem to work for either designers or consumers, especially in age of immediacy. It is also an age where people want more than just seeing clothes and items, but to also experience them.

What can designers and brands do then? After listening to the ***Fashion Is Your Business Podcast*** with **Melissa Gonzalez and Aliana Galán** of **The Lion'esque Group**, one solution comes to mind: a pop-up.



When I first wrote a **review** of Melissa's book on pop-ups, ***The Pop-Up Paradigm***, pop-ups were gaining traction. Major brands would do pop-up to promote a new idea or season, new brands would use them to help test markets and once online-only companies would descend the digital cloud and provide their customers with a tangible experience. Obviously, The Lion'esque Group are innovators in the space—have you heard of any other companies doing the same thing?—she and her team are also logistical wizards who have pulled off a number of successful campaigns. (Clients include J. Hilburn, Ministry of Supply and, most notably, **Marc Jacobs**.) They know the best reasons have pop-up and the best ways to do it.

But, Melissa also looks forward into the future in the book. In some cases, she was looking at advances in retail technology and how they be incorporated into enhancing the customer experiences. She also stresses the importance of experiences and access, which I highlighted

Beyond a fun party with possibility of special guests, pop-ups allow customers to learn about a brand and feel like they are “in the know.” For emerging designers or brands with only a cult following, customers are able to feel like they have access to brand before it gets (even more) popular.

This focus on the consumer and their experience seems especially pertinent now.

To dispense a little history, runways have always been about experiences **since the 1920's**, as Amanda Fortini in *Slate* elaborates:

These early shows were often more theatrical than those of today. They were frequently organized around themes—there were Parisian, Persian, Chinese, Russian, and Mexican shows, Leach notes—and often presented with narrative commentary.

Designers have continued to think about the experience that came with watching their clothes parade down the runway. They have experimented with the concept; whether it be by including music, changing the shape of the runway, incorporating new technology, eschewing the walk for an installation or by playing with the location, or at least the context, that their designs appear in.

However, these experiences have been crafted primarily for buyers and editors in the audience. Consumers tended to only get a look after from photos in print magazines and online or through a video recording. (Thankfully, these fashion shows are now often live-streamed.) In a time where brands are often selling directly to the consumer and selling to them quickly, waiting for clothes to trickle down from fashion shows seems a bit antiquated.

Moving away from the traditional runway, when viewed that way, makes financial and logical sense. Instead of waiting to see how people actually respond to clothes months or a year later, why not debut clothes and designs directly to consumers? Doing so in a pop-up, creates space where designers can get direct social media feedback immediately and for probably less cost than the traditional runway show.

But we can go even further with contemporary advances in technology. The idea of a shoppable runway or installation is not really science fiction anymore, it's now something that just needs the logistics worked out. One can imagine a potential shopper scanning an item, pre-ordering it and then tweeting about it or posting about their purchase on Instagram. Not only does a brand or designer have immediate attention directed towards their new line, but an immediate ROI and data from a controlled environment.

(Of course even as we imagine this runway revolution, I'm not suggesting that buyers and editors are going to be out of jobs. There will still be a need and a want for curation, especially in a time where the choices seem to be growing exponentially and there is no one mainstream market actually many that overlap.)

Whatever direction the runway goes in, the increasing focus on consumers will be key. How designers and companies interpret that focus and what will end up being successful remains to be seen. In the mean time, if you want to provide your customers an experience, you know exactly **who to call**: The Lion's Esque Group.