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8 Ideas for Rocking Fashion Week

We've tapped the strategies of some of the best young companies trying to get noticed by the style-makers and influencers at New York's Fashion Week.

Sure, it's glamorous. But New York Fashion Week is not all champagne fountains and elaborately coiffed models pacing the tents. Assembling all that glitz is a lot of hard work – and not just for the armies of stylists and limo drivers.

If you're not blinded by the flashbulbs, it's easy to see that Fashion Week can be a marketer's daydream. It's tastemaker central, with crowds saturated with cultural influencers: bloggers, buyers, designers, and editors. The big labels, of course, have a literal center-stage during Fashion Week, but emerging fashion, design, and beauty companies also can take advantage. So can, well, anyone. And you don't need to take the Mercedes approach and sponsor the whole shebang.

In fact, a little humility can go a long way. In the throes of the recession last year, Fashion Week could have had an identity crisis. The industry was wounded, but it decided to rally its forces and encourage shoppers to join the fashion week party. Dubbed Fashion's Night Out, the Friday night city-wide shopping event, which layers in-store after-hours promotions with celebrity meet-and-greets and musical events, has now spread to Los Angeles' [Rodeo Drive](#). Events centered around making Fashion Week accessible to average folks (well, average folks who can stimulate the fashion economy) are also being held in a handful of other cities.

We've consulted the experts in promotions, marketing, and events at growing companies trying to get noticed at Fashion Week. Here are some of their best tips.

1. Hold a Charity Event.

Even in this week of celebrating decadence, charity can be a big draw. Stuart Weitzman, the shoe designer, has found a potent formula for brand promotion. It's one part charity (ovarian cancer awareness) mixed with one party celebrity and poured over a ping pong competition.

"Our customers are women, we latched onto ovarian cancer in part because it is a disease that's important to them, and can be, if not cured, prevented. But when you just ask people for money for a cause, you don't get a lot of response," Weitzman says. "If you make it fun, it's a lot easier to draw a crowd. And that's part of what's good for the brand."

Why a ping pong tournament? Pretty much just because Weitzman loves the sport. It's also zany enough to raise an eyebrow, which is just what Weitzman wants.

"Of course, there's a little bit of show business in the fashion business," he says. "When you make a lot of noise, people listen. Newspapers magazines cover it – you get your name in front of the public and see you're doing something worthwhile in addition to making beautiful shoes."

2. Throw a Party.

Ideeli, an online private sale site, is a Fashion Week sponsor online. But to extend its Fashion Week presence, Ideeli is also hosting an end-of-week bash. The target audience: you guessed it, influencers. Well, at least of the blogger variety.

"The primary focus of that party is to reach out to all of the bloggers who have been covering fashion week all week long," said Tamara Rosenthal, Ideeli's executive director of brand marketing. "We appreciate the blogger community, they're very important to us and the designers we work with every day."

The Ideeli and Style Coalition party is slated for the night shows end, ("So no one has to worry about waking up early the next day," Rosenthal says), and Fashion's Night Out is also ripe for event-hosting. Gilt City is hosting a Fashion Week launch party, and plenty of the Friday night retail events have party elements – lights, music, and celebrity appearances.

3. Cater a Show.

When Gregory Baratte, a former director of marketing for Louis Vuitton, launched Hello Pasta, an all-natural fast and casual pasta eatery in midtown Manhattan, this January, he thought he'd said goodbye to Fashion Week being part of his job. Not so much.

When a friend told him cosmetics company M.A.C. and Milk Studios, which together host emerging artists and designers during Fashion Week, were looking for a new caterer, he went for it. This week he and the Hello Pasta team are feeding models, backstage crew, guests, editors, and buyers neat little boxes of penne or fusilli from five catering stations in the studios.

While a company that deals in hearty carbs might not seem to be the snuggest fit for lithe models, the brands are comfortably well matched.

"M.A.C. and Milk are known to support young companies, young designers, not the biggest fashion brand," Baratte says. "Because we are a start-up and we are trying to make it, it makes it a community of people trying to start-up. And that's just where we want to be."

When is it worthwhile to trade a week's worth of food for exposure, though? "When you have a new product, you need as many people as you can to try it. When I realized we would be serving more than 4,000 people that week, I knew it was a good idea."

Baratte wanted to create repeat customers, and encourage word-of-mouth advertising. And the shoe fit, because Hello Pasta is opening a second location in New York's Garment Districe this fall. "The No. 1 objective is to have a group of trendsetters try the product, and this group of people at Fashion Week are a lot of opinion leaders and trendsetters."

4. Pamper the Influencers.

You'll get a lot of their eyeballs along the way. That's the strategy John Amato's Show Media, an Inc. 500 company based in New York, employs. Last year in the economic downturn, Show Media, which supplies about one-third of New York's taxicabs with advertising and cab-toppers, decided to donate \$40,000 in ads to Fashion's Night Out.

"Last year fashion was really beat up. In donating the ads we were trying to help out the people who mean so much to us," Amato says.

This year, Show Media is maintaining a presence during all of Fashion Week by staging vehicles in front of the runways' new home, Lincoln Center. The company's partner taxis last year shuttled

Vogue editors around. This year, it's running a VIP shuttle, and constant shuttles on Fashion's Night Out for shoppers looking to get from, say, Fifth Avenue down to the Meatpacking District.

5. Get Your Product Out There.

Two words: goody bags. It's true that swag bags can be overrated, and some marketing gurus warn against including your products in freebie or sample bags. But when it's done right – and actually reaches your target audience – it can have a big impact. What could be better than getting your product into the hands of someone who will buy it again?

For designers, it's a tricky thing, and giveaways are typically reserved for celebrities or product placement. But across the beauty industry, demonstrations and samples are still king.

Your brand might not be internationally known, but you can take some inspiration from the big dogs in the kinds of freebies and promotions that actually draw a crowd. For instance, L'Oreal takes the direct approach, thinking no one's afraid of taking a free sample. A L'Oreal car will be cruising around Fashion Week and Lincoln Center giving out free Elnett samples and touch-ups. On Fashion's Night Out, it will be parked in SoHo for maximum exposure. Chanel is doing free manicures all Friday night in the Meatpacking District, and consumers can get a runway-ready crimped hairstyle at Cynthia Rowley in the West Village.

6. Get a DJ.

Not just any DJ. A famous DJ.

This week includes quite a slate of trend-forward music, with DJ Alexandra Richards spinning at Sephora to promote YSL's Rouge Flame lipstick, DJ Charlotte Kemp Muehl and Sean Lennon are playing at Mabelliene, and DJ Leigh Lezark is taking her place as the new face of the DKNY campaign. Get the hint? Drumming up some beats is buzz-worthy – you'll get press before the week even starts. And it's not just of the bloggy variety: Vanity Fair's September issue devoted a significant amount of editorial space to Fashion's Night Out, including an event guide.

7. Get Someone Famous for Your Event.

It might seem an unlikely pairing, but when Jersey Shore's Vinny Guadagnino is at C.O. Bigelow's in New York City on Friday night, he won't just be delivering grooming tips: He'll be drawing in a lot of foot traffic and driving sales. Big fist pump.

In the same vein, Maybelline is using models Erin Wasson, Jessica White, and Lisalla Montenegro to judge a catwalk-walking contest. If you're looking for a consumerist, but not necessarily highbrow or uber-opinion leader crowd, consider this tactic for drawing crowds.

8. Sponsor an Emerging Designer.

You may lack a Mercedes-sized marketing budget, but you can still get exposure and cultural clout by linking arms with an emerging designer and sponsoring his or her show. Out of the deal the designer will get the financial ability to put on a great show and you'll get your brand cited alongside theirs. The arrangement will also give you a nice presence during the runway show.

With the more established brands, it's easy to know what you're buying into. With smaller designers, you have to really do your research.

"You have to pick the right partner that matches your own brand's DNA. It has to be a brand that relates to the fashion industry," says Baratte of Hello Pasta. "I was a little shocked to see another fast food company sponsoring fashion week in the past. It has to make sense in terms of the branding and the positioning."

He says it's trickier for brands outside the industry (or the industries of health, beauty, design, or healthy foods) to find matches that make sense. But if you have a good fit, sponsoring an emerging designer is a nice foot-in-the door for Fashion Week. Ideeli, which is sponsoring Fashion Week as a whole this year online, started its relationship with Fashion Week by working with a couple small designers. Now the site has partnerships with a number of high-end brands.

"That's my advice, to try and catch that wave, find the emerging, rather than going right to major sponsorships," says Rosenthal. "When we did that, we could see the recognition, and the approval of our brand partners. And that's our whole goal: We are sending the message to our partners that we are a big part of the fashion community."