

The business of blogging

Professional fashion blogger **Nancy Buckland** shows how blogging has transformed product promotion

Business studies courses have covered the 4Ps for 50 years, treating price, product, promotion and place as if nothing has changed. But just as the place of purchase has switched from shops to computers, so promotion has been turned on its head.

Consumer-led promotion

Promotion is going through considerable change and consumers are leading the way. Through the medium of social networking, 'buzz' about products and services is being created by the people who buy them. If you try something and love it, you tweet about it. Got a complaint? Go straight to the company's Facebook page and make your feelings known. Blogging is the latest growth area and it is changing the way we shape our thoughts and perceptions as consumers.

The fashion industry is one area of commerce that has been hugely affected by blogging. Whether you are a fashion fan or not, it is a great example of how a whole industry is reacting to change. Traditionally, the fashion industry was dominated by two driving forces:

- 1 Leading fashion designers like Mark Jacobs and Giorgio Armani, whose catwalk creations set the trends.
- 2 The fashion press, where fashion editors could build or break brands by writing opinions about them.

However, there is a new kid in town: the fashion blogger. The most powerful fashion, trend and beauty bloggers now take their seats in the various fashion capitals and blog about what they see. They photograph and describe what they love to wear and use, and their followers are inspired. As Katie Bain from the British Fashion Council explains:

“Bloggers have changed the entire landscape of the industry...Fashion Week has long been the realm of magazine editors and department store buyers, but now a growing number of online bloggers are wielding industry influence. Online media at Fashion Week has grown 30% in the past year, and now accounts for about 40% of the 3,000 members of the press covering London Fashion Week.”

Effects of blogging

Blogging has made the fashion world more democratic. Thanks to blogging, fashion models now come from a wider range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and have a greater variety of body shapes. The best bloggers can earn a substantial living, as they can sell advertising space on their blogs, and the established brands are more than happy to pay for the privilege.

The downside for the big designers is that bloggers can publish and report on trends instantly, far in advance of more

traditional media like monthly fashion magazines. By the time their collections hit the stores the trend they are selling will have been around for several months, which is a huge disadvantage. As a result, designers like Tom Ford insist that images of their catwalk designs are only allowed to be published at the same time as the clothes go on sale. However, this is still a new concept in terms of confidentiality and one that only the established designer labels can afford to enforce.

Jane Cunningham, the hugely popular British beauty blogger, is so influential that she was recently invited to an exclusive bloggers event at Dior in Paris, and believes that the success of blogs like hers lies in their impartiality. She says that bloggers are 'influencing decision making when it comes to fashion and beauty purchases as they try before you buy'. As a result, consumers will read highly esteemed blogs before making a purchase.

As the bloggers are so powerful, leading brands will send them items to wear or test out. It is a huge gamble on their part, and can be costly if the write-up is unflattering, but many are still willing to participate because a favourable report can be as valuable as an expensive advertisement.

Embracing change

The fashion and beauty industries are receptive to change. In terms of blogging,

they decided the best way to beat the bloggers was to join them. Commercial companies have taken the blog trend and run with it — fashion giant Burberry now spends 40% of its marketing budget on online media.

Another example is the company I work for, Fake Bake UK Ltd, which produces tanning products. After 3 years of working as their social networking editor, I started a blog as a means to further engage with our customers. In terms of marketing, we don't spend a huge amount on traditional advertising. Our PR representatives get our products placed in the media and ensure that key celebrities who use our brand talk about it in interviews. The blog works alongside current marketing initiatives in order to make our target market feel like a part of a whole lifestyle.

The blog itself is not just about fake tan — that would never work. As well as featuring new product launches and tips on how to use our products, we also comment on fashion, beauty trends, celebrity stories, TV shows and music.

Is blogging a powerful tool? A recent product launch sold out within days of the blog being published, but at this stage it is hard to prove a direct link between blog hits and actual sales. However, the blog is not just about selling. It is a lifestyle commentary for our customers to enjoy and react to. We also use the blog to help us publicise our work in the community, so it really is a multi-purpose marketing platform.

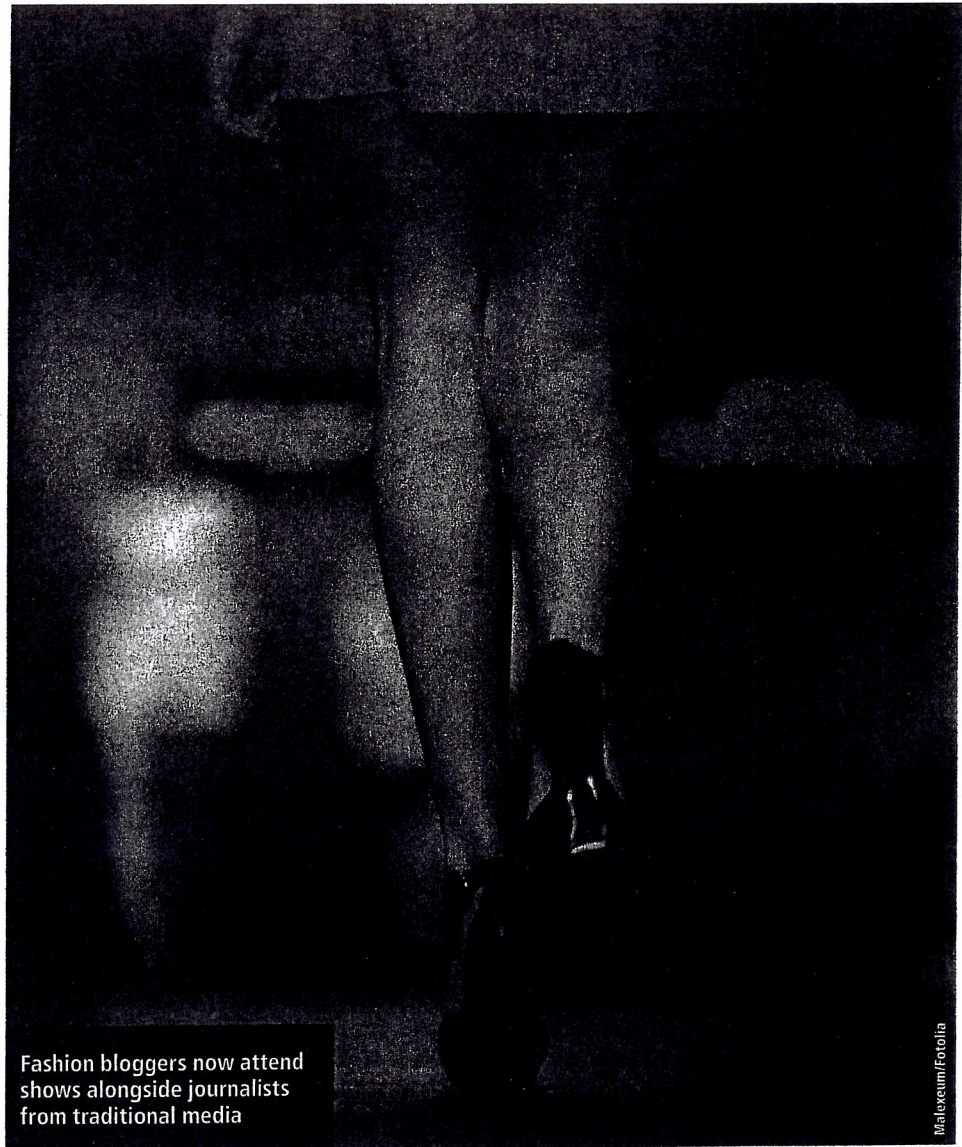
Commercial blogging is not as open as personal blogging, and although the tone is bright and friendly we do not do many of the things independent bloggers do, such as:

- criticise competitors' products
- make personal remarks about our own likes and dislikes
- allow follower comments that are potentially controversial

The blog has to remain tightly controlled so that it fits in with the company's overall marketing mix and image.

Helping the little guy

For smaller fashion companies, a blog can provide a low-cost investment that leads



Fashion bloggers now attend shows alongside journalists from traditional media

Malxemi/Fotolia

to increased visibility in the market. Kirsty Doyle, the winner of *Project Catwalk*, now runs a highly successful fashion business in Liverpool. Her blog has followers from all over the world and Doyle says:

“Online customers expect a brand which is connected through social media, the blogosphere and a successful e-commerce site. Customers want more from a brand, to feel that they are part of the brand and can identify with it. We try as a brand to cover as many bases as possible and offer our customers an insight into the design process right through to the finished product.”

The result for her has been an increase in sales without the need for expensive advertising.

Blog sites like WordPress and Blogspot are growing every day, with millions of bloggers the world over. Fashion and

beauty bloggers have brought a new and fresh perspective to their respective industries and the coverage they enjoy means that blogging is becoming a powerful business in its own right.

Blogroll



www.britishbeautyblogger.com — Jane Cunningham's brilliant, independent beauty site.

www.smartgeezer.co.uk — a male style blog for the young urban man, again an independent style reviewer.

www.kirsty-doyle.com — a commercial blog from a small fashion business.

www.fakebakeukltd.wordpress.com — a commercial blog for Fake Bake UK Ltd.

Nancy Buckland is a former teacher of business studies. She is now social media manager for Fake Bake UK Ltd.