

FASHION

1) What kinds of businesses – products or services – can be started in your subject area?

This is a hard question because there are so many possibilities.

There are very large businesses as well as small businesses in the fashion area. In a large business your position and responsibilities will be very specific. You must know how your position fits in and relates to others in the production process. People who work in large companies need to be able to communicate and work with others well. Sharing of ideas, collaboration and problem solving in a group setting is an important skill.

In contrast, when you work for a small business you typically will wear many hats and may be responsible for more than one specific job - perhaps even several job titles. This can be harder and require more hands on skills to get hired. It is a great way to learn, get more experience in the field and build your resume. It can be very exciting and help you understand potential pit falls in an area that you may be interested in starting up your own business. In a small company, it is critical to enjoy and have mutual respect for the other few employees you are working with. Because of their size, smaller companies who have problems with internal conflicts among employees or employer can be detrimental to their own success and your personal and professional happiness.

How can you tell if you are better in a big company or a small company? Internships in a variety of areas and types of companies can be extremely beneficial. It will help you experience what you like and what you excel at. It will also help you understand process of producing and marketing fashion. This is an area where there are many inner related jobs. The more you understand about the process and how it works the more successful you will be. No experience will be wasted in the long run.

In fashion most people start off wanting to be a designer. This is only one of the many jobs that one can do. It is important to note that although many are initially attracted to becoming a designer, many will switch to other areas including pre-production which can be very financially lucrative.

Within Fashion there are several areas of concentration:

Fashion Design denotes the start of the fashion industry flow. Successful designers are the initial creators sketching, painting and building demonstrations that act as the beginning signs of an idea that will be put into motion. These professionals build creative inspiration through the upkeep of absorbing fashion knowledge that ranges all across the industry. Designers are found in a multitude of areas that include women's wear, menswear, footwear, accessories, textiles, interiors, events, packing and toys.

Preproduction: All companies who produce product will have pre-production. Pre-production works with designers to get product manufactured. It includes sample making, fitting, pattern making, marker making, spec sheets, sourcing of materials and manufacturers. People who work in pre-production and responsible for taking the designers ideas and making them a reality. They intern will hand of the samples, materials and directions for production to the manufacturer.

Fashion Merchandising encompasses all tasks involved in producing a fashion line that ultimately sells. It is the business of fashion. It must attract the attention of buyers who are responsible for getting it off the ground and into the store. Fashion merchandising is the performance of activities to supply consumers with quality apparel in the most appropriate retail setting, during the right season and at the best, most affordable price. The production process calls upon fashion merchandising experts with extensive knowledge in textiles, fabrics and trend analysis. Examples of jobs in this field include fashion directors, buyers, product line developers and trend forecasters.

Fashion Marketing is the primary connection between design and the public. How will the right clothing get into the hands of the right consumer? The job of those in this field is to analyze consumer tastes and show how a brand best fits into that consumers lifestyle. Fashion lines must get noticed through storytelling, and the implementation of advertising campaigns and public relations strategies. The marketing employed might work within a specific company department, outside marketing or advertising firms or as an independent consultant. Some examples of marketing positions in the fashion industry are copywriters, media planners, publicists, event planners, journalists and market researchers.

Fashion Management is a fashion industry area that is found within both corporate and retail environments. Those involved in this field manage day-to-day operations of sales environments, as well as different corporate departments such as production, manufacturing and human resources.

Managers are responsible for supervising employees, whether it be sales associates or those employed within the production department of a fashion house. Examples of management jobs in the industry are sales managers, showroom representatives, apparel production coordinators and human resource managers.

Visual Merchandising is the art of creating engaging displays of fashion. Visual merchandisers combine design ideas with products in a specific environment that is meant to increase store traffic, sales and create emotion. These displays are installed to project a particular image to store customers and effectively promote certain items. These installations are meant to be in-depth, for their purpose is to create a buying mood and telegraph to customers what the brand and store is all about. Display designers, store planners, and window, prop and mannequin stylists are all part of this field and may be independently employed or work with a team.

Art and Graphic Design is a field in the fashion industry that is overlapped within all sectors. For example, an illustrators skills could be called upon for the upcoming advertising campaign of a designer. The same illustrator may very well be utilized by the designer again for a new website layout. This also holds true for a photographer, who might work on a campaign, lookbook, as well as a magazine editorial shoot all within their career.

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2) What are the required steps an entrepreneur must take to launch a business in your field? What education, licenses, exams, clinicals, etc. are required?

None of these are required. That being said, many people make the mistake of underestimating what it takes to start a business in the fashion field. I highly suggest that if you want to start your own business in the fashion area that you find the best community college close to you and get hands on skills. When you start something yourself – you may be the only employee and you need to be able to do all or most of the process yourself to save costs. You do not want to invest a great deal of money in your education or bog yourself with repaying loans. Get the skills you need at a community college and save your money to invest in your idea. But before you embark try to find companies that are successful that are doing something related to what you ultimately want to start yourself. Intern with them and or work for them. Get to know your future business inside and out. Who are their contacts and manufacturers. What problems have they faced and how did they deal with them. This work based learning experience will be extremely valuable and also help you ultimately attract investors and other employees to work with you. Lastly, don't forget fashion is a business! Ultimately you need to make money. Try to take classes and get as much business experience as you can. Look for great organizations like the Fashion Business Inc. a non-profit that strives to help fashion entrepreneurs start up and be successful. Network whenever possible and remember to use social media to its full potential.

3) What are the greatest challenges or obstacles entrepreneurs in your field are facing?

I call it the “Project Runway Syndrome”. We all love the show and it has done a great deal to attract people to our field. It makes it look fun and exciting and it is....but it is also a lot of hard work and you do need a great deal of experience (typically) to make it work. Sure, there is the fluke where someone comes up with an idea and is able to be successful with no business or fashion knowledge but that is an absolute fluke. I get people who contact me all the time who have a great exciting idea for a fashion line or product and they need interns to help. Why? Because they realized that their great idea was not enough in its self. They don't know what to do next and need a student with some education to work for them for free to help. I do not place students with anyone who does not have a background in fashion and a reputable established company. I believe an internship is a place for students to learn, not be in the position to teach their employer or do free work for them they don't know how to do.

Once you actually know what you are doing the biggest obstacle is working with minimums. Most startup companies need to financially start up small. This limits risk and requires less financial outlay. You can work with smaller stores (boutiques with character) and require them to pay COD which also limits risk. Most materials that your source and manufactures will have very high minimums making them impossible to work with . You need to learn where you can get smaller amounts of fabric and trims (etc) and who can manufacture smaller amounts for you locally. People think “Wow...if I can just get a big order from Nordstrom” etc. Well big stores will give you little profit, you will have to borrow against the order to produce, and they pretty much can pay you very late making it difficult to carry the loan. They may even have a charge back policy where you have to take back what they don't sell. You are much better off starting small and evolving. Also many people, even experience people can have problems correctly pricing their line. I have one good friend with many years' experience in the industry. She started her own company and was initially successful. She got one huge order from a major catalog for one of her sweaters. It was even placed on the cover. She had so many problems with the order she was lucky to break even. Scary stuff can happen even to people who do have experience.

4) What does the future hold for your field? What is new? Up and coming? What is the outlook or potential for entrepreneurs in your field?

Technology! Technology is seldom developed for fashion. It will be developed for the medical field, space, military etc. However this technology may have applications for fashion. A big area right now is nanotechnology and 3-D printing. Nanotechnology in the development of textiles for high performance clothing is huge. The Surf and Sport Industry utilizes a great deal of technology to make their clothing perform better and be more comfortable. The Surf Industry dictates fashion trends around the world and we increasingly are focused on comfort as a result in our every day wear. As a start up you do not want to try to compete with the big companies with big pockets. So don't try to compete with the big guys with board shorts. You want to come up with something unique that everyone wants but comfort and performance is increasingly in the minds of the buyer. Sublimation printing is another technology which is making it possible to have your own fabric designs in small quantities. The price is now coming down on this making it more viable to new startups. Technology is also allowing more production to be done in the US replacing the cost of workers and allowing for Mass Customization. Mass Customization eliminates waste allowing the customer to get exactly what they want. Also products that are greener and have a social benefit are appealing to customers with a conscious who will be willing to pay more for a great product that gives back.