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## From The Experts

### FROM THE EXPERTS

From the Experts is a business column which taps into the experience and expertise of CFDA partners and affiliates. Monthly updates will showcase interviews, q&a and tips on topics ranging from finance to inventory management, to human resources and the internet, to sales and marketing. If you are interested in being a contributor or have suggestions for future topics please email [c.bennett@cfda.com](mailto:c.bennett@cfda.com).

### CFDA: CELEBRITY DRESSING “FROM THE EXPERTS”

Celebrity is a powerful tool for sculpting a global image, but building long-term and meaningful alliances requires careful, strategic planning. New York and Los Angeles-based communications firm HL Group approaches each of its clients from a unique perspective, consistently developing customized programs that align with a brand’s DNA. Whether through major film studios, A-list actors or emerging talent, HL Group leverages its international relationships, editorial intelligence and fashion experience to create integrated programs that constantly adapt to the ever-changing, competitive celebrity landscape.

- As a PR agency, how have you seen celebrity relations change in recent years?

- o Celebrity dressing used to be considered a “luxury” for a brand, but now celebrity affiliation is essential to brand positioning in the consumer market. In the past, only the established fashion houses focused on celebrity dressing, but, in the current marketplace, even small start-ups utilize celebrity endorsement to reach their key demographic—in many cases using celebrity to kick-start editorial, especially when the brand does not have an advertising budget.

- What is the most important consideration for a designer/brand looking to integrate celebrity dressing into its marketing efforts?

- o First and foremost, establish a strategy that utilizes celebrities who are brand appropriate. The chosen celebrities should complement a brand’s image and culture. A designer should not be afraid to turn down requests if the person doesn’t reflect the brand vision – even if he/she is widely covered by the press.

- How do you know which celebrities to target?

o The typical desire is to dress the A-list “of-the-moment” talent. While it is certainly essential to build relationships with established celebrities, recognizing emerging talent is just as critical. In Hollywood, stars can be born overnight. Identifying those break-out style leaders and nurturing a loyal relationship prior to the pinnacle of their rise can give a brand a real edge against the competition.

• What are a few recent success stories in celebrity dressing?

o There are countless examples of designers whose careers have been established through a key link to an international celebrity. Perhaps one of the most high-profile recent case studies is Jason Wu and First Lady Michelle Obama. Wu’s connection to the First Lady catapulted him in the international fashion community and to the mass consumer. His increased media coverage and awareness was a strong statement for the power of celebrity.

o Another great example is Marchesa. Even in the brand’s infancy, Georgina and Keren recognized the need for celebrity alignment, and they were very strategic about slowly building cache and demand through select, on-target dressing. Now, Marchesa dresses A-list celebrities on every red carpet from Hollywood to Cannes.

• Is there an ROI to celebrity dressing?

o Celebrity dressing affects the consumer mindset which can, in turn, impact distribution and sales. Brands that have a large celebrity following are more likely to have demand from the consumer, and, therefore, retailers are more inclined to distribute the brand. Nothing speaks louder to a retailer than a consumer walking in with a page torn from a celebrity weekly.

• What is the key to success for a celebrity dressing campaign?

o Two things — relationship-building and consistency. A brand has to actively build relationships with celebrity stylists and “gatekeepers” (e.g. publicists, agents and managers). It’s also important to do the research — don’t push product on a stylist for a client that is the wrong fit or who is known to wear only specific brands. Showing an understanding of the stylist process will earn respect.

o Secondly, some brands focus only on the Awards Season (January-March), but celebrity outreach should be a year-round effort. Whether film premieres or press junkets, a consistent presence within the celebrity community will drive the best results and momentum.