

Fashion's Night Out: A Recap of the Worldwide Event

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On September 5, I boarded a Continental flight from La Guardia to Houston Bush Airport. As I reached my seat, I noticed the woman in 24B wearing the must-have t-shirt, proclaiming "Fashion's Night Out, September 10, 2009". I quickly pointed out her good deed (40% of the proceeds from the sale of the tee benefit the National September 11 Memorial & Museum) and asked her from which retailer in the city did she pick up her memento. "Macy's Herald Square", she replied, in her Southern drawl...I took my seat and thought to myself, 'even the Houston housewife knows about Fashion's Night Out.'

How did Vogue magazine (and partners) pull off the worldwide event, Fashion's Night Out, and the bigger question, did it really succeed in getting people shopping?

In a global initiative to promote retail and as a kickoff to the fall fashion and shopping seasons, restore consumer confidence, and celebrate fashion, U.S. and international editions of Vogue coordinated evening extravaganzas in their respective world fashion capitals - U.K., Greece, Italy, Russia, France, Brazil, India, Spain, China, Germany, Japan and Taiwan – to simultaneously take place on September 10, 2009.

In the United States, American Vogue joined with NYC & Company, the City of New York and the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) to enliven the consumer spirit that churns the economy and boosts the local industry of America's fashion capital, New York City. Next only to finance, fashion is the second-largest industry sector in New York City – the headquarters of more than 800 fashion companies employing 175,000 people and generating \$10 billion in total wages. At City Hall's May 20th press conference to announce Fashion's Night Out, Vera Wang said, "To put it bluntly, if people didn't shop, people lose their jobs."

The initial idea came from the buzz about the emptiness in stores, and consumers fear of shopping being discussed during the Paris collections in early spring 2009. It was a major concern of the industry, so together with CFDA's President Diane Von Furstenberg, Vogue's Anna Wintour conceived Fashion's Night Out – and it couldn't have come at a more needed time. Traditionally, by September the fall season would be well underway, with department stores heavily stocked for the retail boom that is fall. But not this year, as store buyers have been quoted saying they've bought anywhere from 10 – 30% less this season than the previous season. A scary position for retailers who rely heavily on large stock positioning to deliver sales – the less you offer, the less you sell.

Skillfully coordinated to take place on the first evening of New York's fashion week (and the eve of the nationwide debut of *The September Issue*, the documentary of the making of Vogue's September 2007 issue), Fashion's Night Out encompassed festivities galore – from inventive window displays and champagne bars to model and celebrity appearances.

A PSA was created to promote the event and ran frequently in the New York area (click here to view [Fashion's Night Out](#) ad). It featured Anna Wintour, Sarah Jessica Parker, Vera Wang, Donna Karan, Diddy, Diane von Furstenberg, Isaac Mizrahi, Oscar de la Renta, Coco Rocha, Ashley Olsen, Proenza Schouler, Tory Burch, Zac Posen, among others, detailing the vast expanse of the fashion industry, and asking for our support to "make shopping fun again."

The promotions and hype continued with the debut of Style.com's free mobile application for iPhone users to facilitate planning of their own Fashion's Night Out schedule. Users could make a selection from the live updates from the participating stores in New York – with links to the shop's address, phone number, and a brief description of the events and celebrity appearances taking place, along with a Google map link. Quite handy for a city-wide event of this scope.

With some 800 stores participating in New York alone, and all staying open until an unprecedented 11 p.m., they needed to create enough activity to attract the masses. Champagne flowed and DJs played at just about every retailer, but the heavy hitters pulled out all the stops...some highlights from the evening included:

- Kate Hudson, Diane Von Furstenberg, Anna Wintour, Michael Kors, Terry Lundgren (CEO, Macy's) and Mayor Bloomberg at Macy's in Queens
- Actress Charlize Theron signed fragrance bottles at Dior
- Oscar de la Renta hosted a party in his store, and included co-hosts Sarah Jessica Parker, Bette Midler, and Barbara Walters
- Victoria Beckham and designer Narciso Rodriguez greeted guests at Bergdorf Goodman
- Bloomingdale's hosted Gwen Stefani for a personal appearance
- Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen hosted bar at Bergdorf Goodman's (to promote their Elizabeth & James and The Row collections)
- The Giorgio Armani boutique hosted a special reading by Nora Ephron and Rosie O'Donnell from "Love, Loss and What I Wore"
- Saks Fifth Avenue hosted a bevy of designer and cosmetic artist appearances from Donna Karan, Carolina Herrera, Elie Tahari, Giuseppe Zanotti, Justin Timberlake, Peter Som, Kay Unger, Aerin Lauder, Bobbi Brown and Fredrick Fekkai
- Calvin Klein's creative directors Francisco Costa and Italo Zucchelli hosted a party at their Upper East Side boutique alongside actress Michelle Monaghan and Olympic fencer Jason Rogers
- Jewelry designer David Yurman and his wife Sylvia held court in their NY store
- Actress Debra Messing signed autographs at Macy's Herald Square
- Singer Rihanna and actress Sienna Miller mingled with customers at Intermix
- Billy Joel's daughter, Alexa Ray Joel, a budding singer/songwriter, gave a live performance at the Elie Tahari boutique (as did the designer himself)
- Rag and Bone transformed their store into an Irish pub complete with flowing beer, sawdust on the floor and an Irish band
- Henri Bendel hosted Gossip Girl costume designer Eric Saman, designers Badgley Mischka and beauty guru Trish McEvoy
- Cindy Crawford made stops at JC Penney to pose for photos with customers (promoting her new home collection for the retailer); she then scooted over to Roberto Cavalli for an in-store party
- Jeffrey New York hosted designer Jason Wu and actor Hugh Jackman
- NYC Boutique Opening Ceremony brought in classic cars from which emerging designers Rodarte, Proenza Schouler, Alexander Wang and Band of Outsiders sold items created exclusively for the event

As much as the main activity was centralized in Manhattan, many retailers and designers supported the initiative in California as well. The Sunday preceding the event, the Los Angeles Times Image section highlighted the event's L.A. connections. Neiman Marcus - which offered high profile events in all their stores nationwide – put on an ode-to-New-York celebration with hot dogs and cheesecake at their Beverly Hills store. Their Fashion Island location (Newport Beach, CA) hosted a storewide cocktails and desserts soiree, followed by a fashion show for 600+ guests. Additionally, Fred Segal's multi-store complex on Melrose in L.A. hosted more than 35 special events from 7 p.m.– 11 p.m. Designers got in the mix, too - California fashion brands - TOMS Shoes and Trovata - teamed up for a party at TOMS' Santa Monica headquarters.

Although the events on the West Coast were well-attended, New York was certainly the hub. In Manhattan, streets were crowded, stores were packed, and everyone was carrying a bag – 5th Avenue was a sea of shoppers late into the evening.

Designer Yigal Azrouel thought the initiative was a success. “I have to say, it was incredible. The store was so busy,” he said. Did people shop a lot? “Yea, it was actually the best day of the year.” Although he declined to provide a sales figure, the statement, if true, is quite profound.

“We’re just hoping that our global fashion stimulus package works”, said Wintour on the evening of the event. And while its effect on retailers for the fall season remains to be seen, the evening did manage to “make shopping fun”, for one evening in New York, anyway.

Here’s hoping that the woman from Houston managed to make it to her local Neiman Marcus for some shopping fun.

LINKS:

The event's official website:

www.fashionsnightout.com

For a slide show of celebrities, designers, performances, events and activities that took place:

<http://www.style.com/vogue/voguedaily/2009/09/all-about-fashions-night-out/>

New York Times Official Recap Titled “Attempting a Stimulus Package for Clothing Retailers”, that ran on Sept. 11:

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/11/style/11nightout.html?_r=1&scp=3&sq=fashion's%20onight%20out&st=cse