Iowa State University Fashion Show: Why do they Attend?

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Abstract
The popularity of the Peabody award-winning television show Project Runway has sparked public interest in and awareness of the fashion industry ("Project runway," 2009). Coupled with increasing enrollment in textiles and clothing programs (Arthur, O’Neal, Jordan, Kadolph, & Johnson, 2003) and sold out events, many colleges and universities have witnessed enhanced interest in student fashion shows.

Disciplines
Fashion Design | Fiber, Textile, and Weaving Arts | Industrial and Product Design

Comments
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The popularity of the Peabody award-winning television show *Project Runway* has sparked public interest in and awareness of the fashion industry ("Project runway," 2009). Coupled with increasing enrollment in textiles and clothing programs (Arthur, O’Neal, Jordan, Kadolph, & Johnson, 2003) and sold out events, many colleges and universities have witnessed enhanced interest in student fashion shows. Fashion shows have the potential to engage current and future students and to inspire them to consider majors in apparel related disciplines (Cox & Dietz, 1993). Events such as fashion shows, which provide memorable experiences for current and future students, may differentiate schools from their competitors (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Our purpose was to explore the types of promotional efforts that reached the majority of the audience and to understand why audience members attended the Iowa State University (ISU) fashion show.

Fashion shows have the potential to engage current and future students and to inspire them to consider majors in apparel related disciplines.

A total of 4,250 individuals attended the 25th and 26th annual fashion shows (one performance each) in March 2007 and April 2008. A total of 740 surveys were returned with 442 being usable, producing a 10.4% response rate. Most of the respondents (n = 376) were female (85%) with the largest concentration within the age group 18 to 24 (n = 175, 40%). Respondents learned about the show from a variety of sources. The majority (n = 266) learned about the event from friends, family, and teachers (60%). Thirty percent (n = 133) learned about the show through advertisements placed in student, local, and regional newspapers; 8% (n = 35) learned about the show through email, Facebook, and the ISU website. The remainder (n = 9) learned about it from campus visits, recruiting events, or signs placed in local retail outlets (2%).

Given the importance of interpersonal communication and the role of newspapers in promoting the fashion show, planners should weigh the costs and benefits of buying expensive media coverage. For the 2009 event, students associated with the fashion show—whether planners, models, or designers—were instructed to notify a group they were associated with, such as a sorority, a church, or a club, about the event. ISU planners also collaborated with the student newspaper to design a contest called “Shred and Tear” in which students were challenged to create a garment out of newspaper. The winning garments were displayed at the show.

When asked why they attended the show, respondents overwhelmingly stated they enjoyed the atmosphere and excitement, enjoyed sitting and chatting with friends and family members, and that the show was inspirational. Future ISU fashion shows will include an “audience choice” award to actively involve...
attendees at the event, and a “meet and greet” segment following the show for audience members to interact with student designers. Attendee feedback from this annual event provided valuable information to planners of future shows.

References


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