



The Market Day Simulation: Collaboration through Experience

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Due to continued partnerships between designer labels and low to mid-market retailers, collaboration remains a hot topic in the fashion industry. Those involved in apparel product development have been collaborating in teams for many years, and wholesale brands and retailers have been using negotiating skills to create profitable relationships for even longer. In her article “Collaboration in the Fashion Industry,” Anastasia Charbin, Marketing Director of the Fashion Division at Lectra says “[Fashion] throws a diverse set of people together to transform a creative vision into something tangible and profitable” (2012). Today’s graduates need skills that transcend traditional job descriptions combining interpersonal skills and the abilities to build relationships with business partners. A key component of many job advertisements are that the applicant be “a team player.” Our Market Day project gives students needed experiences that imitate the partnerships they will build in their future career endeavors.

This simulation of the market experience is beneficial to all of our fashion majors. We begin the process with a simulated market appointment at which faculty members portray a sales representative and a buyer. Both senior fashion marketing/management (FMM) and fashion design and product development (FDP) students attend this meeting. A spring line (created from a faculty member’s past private label experience) is shown by the representative to the buyer. A line sheet created to accompany the line is given to all students in attendance. This appointment is meant to serve as an example for students attending Market Day. Imitating an actual tradeshow industry appointment is difficult. The Market Day setting shows FDP students what a proper line presentation should include, and FMM students can see the buyer’s response to the presentation, including questions to be asked and selection criteria that need to be considered.

In preparation for Market Day, fashion design and product development students create original line sheets showing their senior collections. The students tag their garments, design signage with their logo and display their collections using a gridwall display system and dress forms. The fashion marketing/management students are given an assignment that includes their target markup, specifications about garments to purchase and required negotiations. At Market Day, FMM students attend appointments with all designers. The designers present their collections and FMM students take notes of garments to purchase. They photograph any item being considered and negotiate costs and/or changes to garments. Their buys are entered into a spreadsheet called a grid that visually shows all garments being purchased along with cost, retail, item description, quantity and negotiated changes. Because FMM students are required to “buy”

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a full opening inventory for their capstone businesses, this spreadsheet provides a way to practice completing a grid and receive feedback before undertaking the assortment planning and purchasing process. When the FMM grids are completed, a recap shows how many times each item was purchased. The collections and best sellers are ranked. This information is shared with all students, both FMM and FDP majors.

Fashion communication students are also invited to Market Day and they cover the event from a journalistic viewpoint. Students in the art direction and photo styling class choose garments they will feature in assignments. Students who write for the campus newspaper cover the event and publish related news items. Senior fashion communication majors may use outcomes from the experience in their senior capstone projects. Underclass students of all majors also attend Market Day so they can view the tradeshow process early on. There are usually between 50 and 100 students participating in the event.

The fashion program uses Market Day in assessment measures. In the FMM program, the Market Day grids are used as an assessment measure of the student-learning outcome that students “should demonstrate proficiency in current industry technology and technical skills.” From 2011 to 2014 students exceeded the benchmark set and no action plans or changes were necessary. In the FDP program the Market Day experience is used to measure the student learning outcome that all students “should demonstrate the ability to present ideas in professional and persuasive ways through oral, visual and written communication, understanding and using appropriate terminology.” In 2013 all students met the benchmark set but in 2014 only 80% of the students met the benchmark. For 2015 the event was moved to a location that provided a more open and professional environment to further simulate the trade show atmosphere.

Recently, the college’s strategic communication and business programs have been moved into the School of Design. We intend to integrate a collaborative experience that would allow business students to work with designers and retailers to propose ideas that would further improve their marketing strategies. Experiential learning provides a chance to gain knowledge in a holistic approach through reflective observation and more active experimentation (Kolb, 1984).

References

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