Showroom10: Greek designers showroom

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Showroom10: Greek designers showroom

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Abstract. Showroom10 is the first exclusive Greek designer’s showroom. It represents established and upcoming Greek designers in Greece and Cyprus. The mission and main task is to successfully place the designer’s collections in the Greek, European and worldwide market. The purpose of the showroom is to put a collection in front of the appropriate buyer accelerate its revenue growth and create brand awareness. The search for new collections is one of the most important tasks and challenge of a showroom’s business. Market research, travels and fashion trade shows are some ways to stand before an interested brand. Each collection must first be selected in terms of authenticity, clear brand DNA as we call it in fashion. Secondly, must be competitive in terms of materials, designs and prices. But, are all the above enough for the global fashion market? This paper describes a case study (Showroom 10), showing a general overview about the most important phases of “designer’s road” in Greece.

1. Introduction
Showroom10 is the first exclusive Greek designer’s showroom. It represents established and upcoming Greek designers in Greece and Cyprus. The mission and main task is to successfully place the designers collections in the Greek, European and worldwide market. The purpose of the showroom is to put a collection in front of the appropriate buyer and accelerate its revenue growth and create brand awareness for new designers and brands.

The search for new collections is one of the most important tasks and challenge of a showroom’s business [1]. Market research, travels and fashion trade shows are some ways to stand before an interested brand. Each collection must first be selected in terms of authenticity, clear brand DNA as we call it in fashion. Secondly, must be competitive in terms of materials, designs and prices because they have to compete in global context.

But, are all the above enough for the global fashion market?

2. Research method
To answer the previous research question, the paper will present a case study [2] with a Greek company focused in the development and promotion of new fashion designers in Greece and Cyprus. The research methodology can be quantitative or qualitative: the qualitative analysis is presented as the most recommended when the researcher wants to study a small sample of entities and the study is focused on a theme or on a sector. It is also recommended when the investigation aims obtaining detailed and in-depth information on situations, events, people, organizations, interactions and behaviors observed by the investigator during the field research [3]. A qualitative analysis of a research issue can be done with a single case [4] if that will allow a depth understanding of a question or a problem. A case study uses different sources of evidence and is relevant to answer to the questions “What”, “Why”, “How” and “When”. “What is happening here?”, “Why is it happening?”,
“How has it come to happen this way?” and “When did it happen?” are examples of questions that the researchers will put during the investigation [5].

To achieve this understanding, the case will be described and analysed from different points of view, according the literature available.

3. Case study, processes and results

What is a fashion showroom: A fashion showroom is a team of experts in the fashion field. The team must have knowledge of textile, fabric construction and textile trends, knowledge of the latest fashion trends in terms of styling, new elements used, constantly following the leading fashion experts and develop the asset of guidance, to the designers they select to host at the showroom. They must also have a very good knowledge of the market at any time, as this is a tricky parameter. The market is like a fluid, constantly trying to take a shape and a path. All has been seen and all has been displayed! But is that so? No it is not. Nowadays the market requires a value for money product along with a lasting experience. The buyers need to know that they don’t just buy something. They buy something they really need to feel better or to satisfy theirs needs [6]. I may have said enough at this part and this will drive us to totally different paths, so lets stay with the good knowledge a showroom must have so that they achieve their purpose. Moreover combing all above the team make strong marketing plans targeting at the correct boutiques for each collection. Also during the period of not hosting customers, the provider’s consulting services makes analytical reports to their designers so that they understand the new data and evolve better for the next season.

Commercial and technical analysis of collections: The showroom team is a group of account managers who share the collections, analyse them and provide a number of characteristics to the collection that are used as selling tools to the customers. These characteristics have to do with the performance of each collection. Moreover, there is a list of practical tools provided by the designers such as “lookbooks”, photos with models wearing the collection, “colorcards”, etc [1].

It all starts when a collection is selected to be hosted in the showroom. The designer of the collection is chosen for his authenticity, clear brand DNA as said before but also because the showroom team believes his collection can sell in the current market. Each collection is composed of different clothes or styles as we call in in commercial terms, including tops, bottoms, dresses, coats, etc. These range of styles must at all times stand alone as a unique piece but at the same time must bond and match with the other pieces of the designers collection [7]. This does not mean that they must be worn together but the must definitely create an image to the buyer that they belong together. This is exactly the idea of a designer’s collection. All the styles have technical characteristics such as the fitting, when a person wears the garment, the sense of an elegant fabric, the high end design that create the final impact and experience to the one that tries it on. Moreover a unique design or a design with a unique DNA is always more competitive. This kind of analysis is done for all collections, and for all the styles each collection is composed. In this way the showroom team eliminates the styles that are not needed. Final selection will lead to a proper look book, which is a very important tool to work with. A lookbook involves, the designer, a fashion photographer, a stylist, a make up artist that work together to produce the idea, or else the concept of the collection in such a way that the buyers will understand what they shop. Together with the lookbook, comes a color card with all the alternative colors a designer suggest for the upcoming season as well as a line sheet. A line sheet is a technical tool, most of the times is created in an excel sheet, that includes: a technical sketch, the variety of colors, the size range, the wholesale price and the suggested retail price. Finally the designers have to present their collections to the showroom team, exactly like they are trying to sell their collection. This task is very important as it’s the first crush test before their collection is exposed to buyers.

Argument impact of collections to wholesale market: The showroom must have strong arguments and must be full aware of the market so that the account managers provide this information to their customers and convince them to place an order with a new collection. This way they create a strong relationship between collections and stores that lasts long enough.
Strong arguments require very good knowledge of the constantly changing market. The team must spend quite enough time in the market to witness the physical change. They have to travel in the country but also worldwide to view these changes and carry their experience to the designers. Markets evolve towards a different direction nowadays. They participate in the local but also global change of their customers needs. The most efficient and accurate they become the less they bleed. The showroom team need to experience these changes and find the new tools or methods to keep up with this change. I mentioned it a while ago I will once more: Purchasing experiences makes people happier than purchasing goods. So goods need to go along with an experience.

Strong relationship with the showrooms buyers is one of the most important elements. It is an asset the showroom creates and it is the fortune of the showroom team. It’s the price you pay to be part of a good showroom if you are a designer. Strong relationships are based in trust and efficiency. The team plays the most important part, being the link between the buyer and the designer. They use their skills to balance both parts. So that both the designers but also the buyers feel they can depend. According to the buyers they assist or serve the team is often on the road, paying visits, assisting with problems, or final customers if needed, and providing various after sales service, which is most important to gain a buyer. Always of course within the limits and terms of being fair and specific. A third very important parameter that strengthens the impact of a collection besides the good knowledge of the market and the buyers is the inspiration the designer shares with his account manager that boosts a lot the collection. If a collection has a strong concept, theme for example that influences and creates a more intimate effect, an ownership of the collection, it is definitely the way to the most efficient results.

Collection physical set up in the showroom: The display of a collection in the showroom spaces must be decided by the account management team. The team must decide the right placement in the showroom space and the neighbour collections, so that the result is the most efficient. When a buyer walks in a showroom or even a trade fair, it is a matter of seconds to decide if they will place a new designer in their shop. Isn’t that amazing? Buyers decide with a first glance, as its love at first sight if they are interested in a collection or not. And this decision has to do primarily with the physical set up. The row that each style is following the next is important. The sequence is determined by the use of each style: for example we place a top or shirt first and the pant or skirt second. If this group has a jumpsuit or coat, or cardigan they follow their group. But sometimes if in the flow requires a touch of color it will be necessary to through among them a colourful cardigan, or coat that will be a nice match with the monochromes. So it becomes more attractive to the eye. The same logic is also followed during the set up of the different collections. All the collections that follow one another must smoothly flow in accordance with one another in terms of style and color strength. This way they will be most efficient and will appeal better to the buyer. Finally another important detail is the distance between the hangers. Each hanger must be at a safe distance from the next so that it is visually clear to the buyer’s eye.

Market research: The market research is constantly in the front line. Travels, trade shows, regular visits, media, internet research are the most common tools. The showroom team must travel, attend trade shows, or fashion events and even participate with their designers to the most important fairs. This way the account managers obtain knowledge of the new entries, they identify their potential competition and their competitive advantages [8]. Research through internet and social media network is also very important. Social media and internet announce the new data faster. This allows the team to adjust quicker to the new parameters. But travelling, exhibitions, fashion shows, etc, are also very important for the designers themselves. The designers must travel for inspiration, participate in tradeshows for experience and awareness, and become viral with their social tools.

Prevention of orders: The timeline to present collection for the next season usually lasts from one to one and a half month. The most important step to receiving an order is the proper presentation of the collection. The customer must understand and be full aware of the competitive advantages of the collection towards their market group. The orders are registered in specific order sheets and are forwarded to designers. The designers will then proceed to the order analysis, so that they can start production. At this point I will have to explain how we proceed step by step to the prevention of an
order. An important number of customers is invited to the showroom headquarters during the one and a half month that the presentation of the collections of the next season takes place. Specific appointments are being placed during this period. When a buyer books an appointment is introduced to all the collections that are hosted in the showroom and takes quite some time to present and explain properly the characteristics. The buyer then decides which collection is most right for the shop. Then the account manager of the specific collection analysis the styles, makes suggestions to the buyer combining tops with bottoms or adding a cardigan that could match the set. In this way the account manager of the collection and the buyer select a number of styles and create a specific final selection customized to the needs of the shop. This way a new collection gains its own space in a new shop. The line sheet of the collection is filled with the quantities in each size and color according to the styles selected by the buyer. The lookbook helps the buyer to view the clothes worn and feel even safer with the choices made.

Order confirmation: When receiving an order the designer involved, has to analyze each order separately in terms of fabrics, auxiliary materials, sizes, colors, etc [9]. Then the designer calculates all necessary purchases and organizes the production timetable. Final products have to be exactly according to the specifications of the samples and they have to be perfect from the beginning. As soon as the designer finishes his planning, he proceeds to final official confirmation to the showroom manager and to the account manager of the collection, in compliance towards delivery conditions and quality terms. In addition to the above and before the designer starts to organize the production, a sales meeting must be held between the showroom manager, the account manager of the collection and the designer. During this meeting the account manager of the collection will inform both the designer and the showroom manager about all the comments received by the buyers and all the notes made to improve the samples. The next step is a “fitting process”. A fitting process is very important and essential. A correct size model must try all the samples and notes must be made for corrections on patterns or on the styles if needed. Sometimes the buyer’s comments help more than expected as their everyday compact with the final customers provides them the most updated requirements. As soon as the fitting process is completed the designer may proceed with the organization of the production having taking under consideration all the above. Finally there is an economic arrangement made by the account manager and the buyer which is like a private contract bonding both the buyer and the designer, the first to receive the order properly and the second to commit to its delivery.

Order production: During the production, a timeline is given to the account manager selected by the showroom for the specific collection. The account manager receives regular reports regarding the production process, and is notified if a problem occurs. If during production the designer decides to change some specification, or has to change a material, or anything that is not according to the product sold to the buyer, the designer has to inform the account manager as soon as possible. The account manager contacts the buyer immediately and informs about these changes. The buyer has a right to accept or not accept these changes and might even cancel the specific styles if the alternatives given by the designer are not to the buyers taste. Of course if the designer is lead to the changes because the products are improved, the buyer has to understand and accept. But all these changes are accepted as long as the delivery is not affected, in terms of quantity and quality. In case of lack of quality or delivery issue, an immediate notification must be made to the account manager and further to the customer. If such a notice is not made properly and on time and a quality or delivery issue occurs, the buyer is entitled not to receive the order and the economic arrangement as well as the contract are no longer valid. In this case the designer has to compensate both the buyer and the showroom according to the contract.

Deliveries in terms of agreement: Deliveries for orders can take place partially, in one, two or more parts, according to the agreement done from the beginning and according to the terms of payment as well. All products must be delivered within the timeline agreed and the quality specifications as well. When the final order is delivered to the buyer, the last needs to check the invoice and the packing list issued to be according to the order placed as well as the physical appearance of the products. Check style by style that all is well with the order and according to the specifications the buyer agreed to. If a
deviation occurs and one or more pieces are not complied with the order placed the buyer is entitled to return these pieces for correction or return them any way. This control has to be within logical timeline on behalf of the customer and that is usually from one to two weeks. If this period ended and none notification for deviation of specs or any complaint has occurred the buyer is not entitled to complain later as during the sale period in a shop a garment can be damaged by a potential customer.

**Presentation of collection in the stores:** When deliveries are completed and the collections are successfully on time in the stores, the account manager that is in charge of the specific collection, sees to the proper presentation of the collection in the store [7] and satisfies the potential consumer. Of course the final decision for the correct positioning of the collection is always the buyers. The account manager can make a suggestion that s not always followed . The account manager is regularly in touch with the store manager for any issue, query, or reorder.

**Advertising campaign and sales material:** All the designers or designer brands must support their products in the stores by providing “lookbooks”, photos and the right advertising material according to the type of each collection. The lookbook is one of the most important tools, used to communicate the collection and its concept both to the buyer and finally to the customer. The customers need to be in a way convinced about the reasons they need to buy a new cloth or accessory. There has been quite some time since consumers’ enormous trend to buy and buy stopped. Not only because they are being extra careful with their economic state, but mostly because they want to feel they need what they are buying and that each and every new item they add to their inventory is fresh, different and in many ways useful. The greatest advertising campaigns followed by the great houses of fashion are focusing towards this direction. The leading parts in these campaigns are given more and more to every day looking models, Models male or female, that have an ordinary look and that customers can identify themselves with them. Models need to present personality [10] more than a great look. It is this personality that makes an impact to the customer. So it is like the final customers have the leading part. Lookbooks or campaigns that present perfect models with perfect clothes, that seem to lead a perfect life have no longer any impact on the consumers. Both lookbooks and advertising campaigns in magazines, physical or on-line ones, need to follow these new rules. Some designers have already experienced these changes and they managed to evolve, finding the correct way to communicate their work to the public. Some still insist on presenting something “perfect”. Perfect does not exist. Perfect is false. Real and natural is the new truth. People-consumers need these kind of products and the designers need to find the way to communicate their products based on these new standards. Besides the advertising campaign and lookbooks that can be visual or on-line in a boutique, the designers have to interact via social media, with their final customers so that they create a kind of a relationship. The most followed designers are those that the public feel close and those that respect their public the most. Sometimes even a live event in a boutique or a bigger event with guests, boutiques of final consumers may be very important for the public image of a designer, especially as a brand is growing bigger. Finally a big screen, in a boutique playing interesting videos or media images to the customers along with a relaxing music background creates a more relaxing environment and helps an easy sale.

**Sell out:** During the selling period from day one to last day of the season that a collection is presented in a store, each account manager in the showroom is responsible to follow up the course of the sales in a store and help with creative ideas or suggestions that will help the better sell out, or prevent the store manager from possible mistakes. The account manager can help the buyer with the setup, the combinations, by emphasizing the technical characteristics of the competitive advantages of one collection. They can skype, meet, do facetime at any available hour so that they achieve the most efficient sell out. Nevertheless and despite of any help provided by the account manager the owners of a boutique and only them have the total responsibility of the sell out. They need to be updated in all areas. Boutique set up, media aware, trend aware, etc. It’s very important for a boutique to have a good sell out before any sales period. The sell out is a number very irrelevant. The number has to do both with quantity but also with the variety of styles. And the number is always affected by the current economical situation in a market. Therefore special initiatives must be taken by the buyers depending in the different parameters of each season.
Media support: New and mighty allies in this strategy are all social media tools, Facebook, and even more Instagram, are becoming more and more efficient in our everyday work [11]. Social media are most helpful in all the ways the designers and their collections interact with their customers. The customers want to be updated, be part of happenings in fashion, and the closest mean is the social network as they are very attached to Facebook and Instagram.

4. Conclusions and future developments
Vision of showroom10: Showroom10 wishes to expand its border and create the possibility for Greek fashion and Cyprian fashion designers to be hosted and presented in Europe within the safety and promotion process that showroom10 provides. The challenge is to establish a pop up showroom with presence in the main fashion capitals of the world and prepare all the processes of making a business plan about this purpose. This business plan is under construction since the beginning of 2016 and hopefully will see the light by the end of 2017 or beginning 2018. Far from the fashion world cities (Paris, Milan, London, New York or Tokyo), the fashion companies in Greece and in other European countries have to find ways to promote young and promising designers from countries with textile and clothing industry in order to recover the European fashion creativity. Europe has a very important history in textile. Countries as Spain, Portugal, England, Greece, etc have proven to be great in this area in the recent past [12]. There needs to be each government’s initiative to use its important resources. There could be teams of creative people working as a unit, designers, textile units managers that still exist and try to make it further, sales people with good knowledge of the market, etc and all together recreate textile business in Europe. Everybody needs to know where their clothes and accessories are made. Everybody needs to know who makes their clothes. Don’t you?

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