

A High-Tech Velvet Rope for High Fashion

Eddie Mullon and his software firm, Fashion GPS, are helping some of the biggest names in the industry cut through the chaos of Fashion Week.

BY TRACY HOPKINS | September 14, 2010

Even as the glitterati prowl outside the velvet ropes during New York Fashion Week, Eddie Mullon is poised. And, thanks to Mullon's tech savvy, so are his high-profile clients

But don't mistake the 39-year-old New Yorker's mild-mannered demeanor for a lack of passion. On the contrary, Mullon's singular drive led him to create Fashion GPS, a customized software platform that helps fashion houses and their public-relations firms to manage events and track clothing samples. Think of it as a logistics planner for fashion, helping companies manage their public-relations efforts and measure their bottom-line results.

Although Fashion GPS has worked with top designers for several years, the system's profile has been raised because of its partnership with talent agency giant IMG, the company that produces Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week in New York and other fashion capitals.

"My focus has always been creative. But I've also been fascinated by technology," says Mullon, who studied computer science at Brighton Polytechnic in the U.K. "Having those two skill sets gave me an interest when I found there was a niche in the fashion industry. Even though what Fashion GPS does is not a creative part of the industry, [the software is] glamorous as well. So that made me pursue it."

New York-based IMG is underwriting the cost for designers to use a customized version called Fashion GPS for Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week. It allows designers and public-relations companies to send electronic invitations synched with the event's registration and credentialing system, receive and manage RSVPs in real time, and automate seating assignments. Because attendees can print their e-mail invitations and seating assignments and scan them at a kiosk or with a staffer, Fashion GPS will also help relieve the sort of check-in chaos that's become synonymous under Fashion Week tents. Staffers also can check guests in on-site using an iPad app.

"The Fashion GPS for iPad app allows us to take care of our clients' guests from when they receive their invitations to when they take their seat at the show in the most efficient yet personal way," says Rachna Shah, senior vice president of public relations at KCD, a New York PR firm specializing in the fashion industry. "We each have fully integrated information at our fingertips to make attending our shows effortless."

Fashion has always been on Mullon's radar. The native of Malawi grew up the U.K., and came of age in the 1980s during Britain's avant-garde fashion and New Wave music scene.

"It's an amazing industry," he says. "It's one of the industries where the product [constantly] changes. You have to reinvent yourself."

Mullon knows a thing or two about reinvention. As a teen, he worked odd jobs assembling circuit boards at an electronics factory, making dough at a pizzeria and flipping burgers at McDonald's. That he only lasted two weeks in fast food was an early indication that he might one day be his own boss.

At 22, Mullon started his first entrepreneurial venture, Edwin Mullon Consultancy, a London-based Web design firm. Within a few years he relocated to New York City, where he was recruited to head the interactive media department of Dimensional Media Associates, a 3-D monitor and display company. After about a year, he branched out on his own again to create Visionary Interactive, a full-service multimedia design firm, where he worked with public-relations firms, celebrities, record companies and luxury real-estate clients.

"It was interesting work and on the forefront of technology," he says. "But I always had that entrepreneurial spirit."

KCD had been one of Visionary Interactive's clients. In 2003, the company asked Mullon to develop a computer program for tracking the designer samples KCD sent to magazines, stylists, models and celebrities, and that became the genesis of Fashion GPS.

"For another couple years, I was out there trying to sell it," says Mullon, who admits it was difficult to get clients to give up their antiquated Excel files and sticky notes. "I was so passionate about it I was knocking on everyone's door -- going to PR companies and [looking for] any opportunity I had to present it." In 2004, Mullon parlayed his relationship with KCD into a deal with Marc Jacobs. In 2005, he formed partnerships with designer Donna Karan and PR firm Bismarck Phillips Communications & Media. "Eddie is open to how things can work better and differently. One thing that keeps me with [Fashion GPS] is I can come to them and say, 'Can we do XYZ?' and they will figure it out," says Carrie Phillips, a partner at Bismarck Phillips. "We always try to stay a step ahead of the competition, and to this date [he and his team] have never said something is

impossible. They try to find a way to make it work, which is why we're together."

Phillips, who represents American fashion designer Erin Fetherston and Bono's ethical clothing line Edun, adds: "It's important for us to have a streamlined process. We can update our data system wide that's shared with our four offices in New York, Los Angeles, London, and Paris. It makes it easier to see what's being done in each office and share information in real time."

To date, Fashion GPS has 15 employees and 61 clients, including Diane Von Furstenberg, Versace, Jimmy Choo and Chanel. The company has earned more than \$5 million in revenue. Pricing varies depending on the number of users and the function. Sample tracking goes for \$400 per user per month and event planning costs \$350 per user per month. For \$550 per user per month, clients can get both.

Just as Fashion Week is getting underway in New York City, Mullan is already fielding late-night calls from overseas clients in preparation for upcoming shows in London, Paris, and Milan. His biggest challenge, however, is juggling work and family life.

"That's the hardest thing with running and owning a business," says Mullan, a married father of two, whose son Liam's robot camp was his next appointment. "You always have to find a balance and spend as much time with your kids."

Down the line, Mullan sees "a natural progression" to adapt Fashion GPS to large-scale entertainment events like the Grammys and the Academy Awards.

His advice for entrepreneurs looking to gain entrée into the high-fashion business?

"If you believe in something and stick with it, it will work out," he says. "Always be passionate about what you're doing. I'm interested in and love what I do."