

Starting a brand? All you need to know

By Elisa Pervinca Bellini, Francesca Bottenghi

Just about every designer dreams of starting their own brand. The secret is always to start off on the right foot. What are the essentials to grasp before launching oneself into the fashion world? We asked seven professionals in the sector to share their advice. **EDUCATION AND PSYCHOLOGY - ROBERTO D'INCAU, head-hunter and coach, Lang&Partners. How does a designer know when they are ready to set up their own brand?** Creativity is a necessary condition, but it's not enough. They also need to know how to handle themselves in the business world. It's better if they do this with a managerial or entrepreneurial partner. **What is the ideal educational path for a designer?** Attending a good fashion school is very useful both for acquiring technical skills and also for the network of contacts that a school can offer. Schools often invite us fashion professionals to meet new talents, so it's an excellent opportunity to make a name for oneself. **Some designers start their own brands immediately after their studies, while others first gain experiences at top fashion houses. What is your advice?** I believe it's a mistake to set up one's own brand straight out of college. It's much better to understand how a company works on a creative and business level from inside a fashion house, and then think about one's own project, involving the right partners. **What are the necessary psychological traits for a designer attempting to embark on a solo career?** A designer has to be able to handle relations properly, but also be creative and entrepreneurial at the same time. It's not easy to have all these qualities, which is why it's

your company, for how you are going to reach those goals – and when you're going to reach them. Yes, it is a document to share with potential investors, but it's also a communication tool to explain your business strategy to your team, your suppliers and partners, and anyone else with whom you work closely to achieve your business objectives. **Where and how can a designer find funding?** At the beginning, when you are raising small amounts of money, it is easier to go to angel investors – friends and family who are willing to back you and your ideas, because they trust and believe in you. Then, as your business grows and becomes more established, you can look to more professional investors for larger amounts of capital – or to banks, for loans. Seek out investors who are able to bring more than capital – expertise, connections, access – that can help you with your business. Once you have investors on board, they are part of your business journey and you will be answerable to them all along the way.

LEGAL ASPECTS/BRAND PRESERVATION AND DEFENCE OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS - FABIO MORETTI, lawyer, founder of the Moretti Burgio studio. A designer who starts their own brand needs safeguarding, but from whom and with what kind of space-time extension? What tools do they have to protect their brand? It's of utmost importance to guard one's distinctive trademark, whether it's the name of the designer (a patronymic brand) or another denomination or logo. Firstly one needs to conduct a clearance search to make sure the

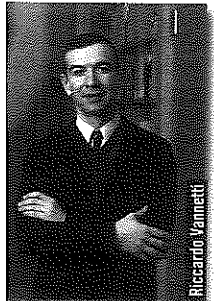
designer can face? Often contractual aspects linked to intellectual property rights – and not only – are left till last when launching a new enterprise in the fashion or design sector: if not formulated and controlled correctly from the outset, relations with manufacturers, agents or distributors can sometimes generate misunderstandings and even arguments. So the definition of areas entrusted to third parties, the duration of contracts and the existence of exclusives are elements that, if not immediately clarified, can lead to serious uncertainties and sometimes even lawsuits. In my experience, legal problems, uncertainty and avoidable costs can arise from choices such as leaving the patrimony of intellectual properties in the hands of others – for example agents or distributors. Lastly, in frequent cases where a designer is flanked by financial backers who enter the company structure, it's also essential to govern relations with these backers with reference to the brand's ownership.

PRODUCTION - RICCARDO VANNETTI, tutorship Director at Pitti Imagine. How does one choose the most suitable manufacturer? First of all, it's necessary to examine the characteristics of a manufacturing platform, looking at the projects that a company has worked on, or in which it is still involved. The manufacturer must have a sound empathy towards the idea itself. **What types of contract are available?** In the classic production licence, the company's owner takes a brand under licence with a view to both production and distribution. The firm might then use its own sales platform or turn to a showroom.

protection, since it's a constructive collaboration with the company. This is where a project like Pitti Tutorship comes in useful, by expressing and maintaining the right relationship between creativity and the work of those who turn it into a product.

How much does it cost to start production? It all depends on the type of collection and the single garments to be produced. A first collection is usually very expensive, since all the paper patterns have to be created from scratch. One can even invest up to 4,000 or 5,000 euros for a single garment.

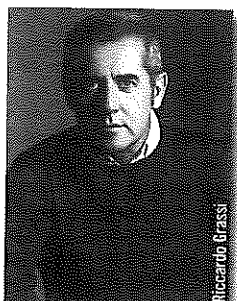
DISTRIBUTION - RICCARDO GRASSI, founder and owner of Riccardo Grassi Showroom. What features must a designer look for in a showroom? Empathy is very important, which means sharing the project with the showroom. Given the market's continual evolution, the designer also has to consider if the showroom has an international character, and assess the potential of their brand in each geographic area. **What kind of contracts are used today between emerging brands and showrooms?** We use European Union agency contracts, with no particular clauses. **How is a distribution strategy outlined?** If we're talking about a general distribution strategy, the approach should definitely be worldwide. In other words, the brand must be assessed on a global level from a medium- to long-term viewpoint, also based on the brand's productive capacity. It's also very important to consider what type of collections it intends to bring out. At present it's ideal to do 4 releases (2 main collections, a resort and a fall).



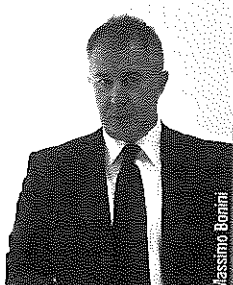
Riccardo Vannetti



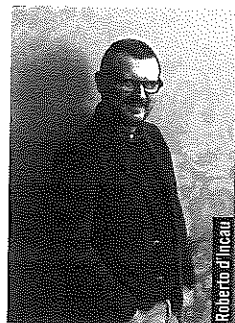
Sabrina Bonini



Riccardo Grassi



Massimo Bonini



Roberto d'Incau

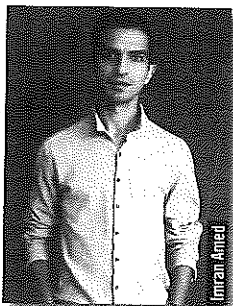


Fabio Moretti

important to be flanked by a good team. **MARKET RESEARCH AND BUSINESS**

PLANNING - IMRAN AMED, founder and CEO of The Business of Fashion. What kind of market research should emerging designers conduct before starting their brand? Most of all, get to know your customer. Where does he or she live? What do they do? What is their lifestyle? What are their spending habits and what are their other interests? The more you can understand about the way they live and work, the more able you will be to create products that fit into their lives. **Do you think that besides womenswear, menswear and accessories there are interesting niches designers should focus on?** There are lots of customers who don't fit into the mainstream of fashion. For example, plus-sized fashion brands are growing rapidly, as they tap into an underserved market segment. **How should designers deal with the concept of a "business plan"?** A business plan is your bible for setting out a vision and the goals of

brand name doesn't already belong to someone else. Then it's advisable to register it as a community trademark, thereby protecting it with a single registration in EU countries, and then extending it as an international or national brand in the countries of greater interest. It's also very useful to protect the domain name of interest to avoid having to reclaim it later at an increased cost. Once it's registered, the brand must be used within the period stipulated by the relevant regulations so as not to incur forfeiture. The registration is valid for ten years and can also be repeatedly renewed. **What instruments are there to protect the designers' creations?** Protective provisions for design and copyright can be very useful to safeguard the rights of designers' creations. It's always a good idea to turn to a specialist to examine what you can and should protect. **What are the most frequent legal problems that a**



Imran Amed

ask for a stake in the brand itself. There are also contracts with support for designers regarding communication and design aspects. But in this case the manufacturer makes an even longer-term investment that can last as long as 10 years or more. Alternatively, one can draw up simple production contracts where the owner of the brand is responsible for distribution. **How can a designer protect themselves in relation to the manufacturer?** I wouldn't speak of

Whoever opts for this kind of contract does so because they're making a long-term investment – normally from 5 to 10 years – and in this case it's possible for the manufacturer to

DISTRIBUTION - MASSIMO AND SABRINA BONINI, founders and owners of Massimo Bonini showrooms. What features must a designer look for in a showroom? Designers must choose a showroom with which they feel they can have an exchange of ideas. The showroom should also have a portfolio compatible with their brand's image. **What services must a showroom provide?** The showroom must have a professional team that proposes the brand to suitable clients, keeping the brand informed of sales performance and reporting feedback on the collection. It should also offer 360-degree support regarding the choices to be made for the line's development and growth. **What advice would you give to emerging designers?** Before launching their own line, designers must carry out an in-depth study of their brand concept projected over at least 3 years. They should also be able to support it economically for at least the first 2 years.