

DRESS UP YOUR TALENTS TO LAND A FASHION JOB

Summary: Learn how to combine your interest in fashion and business into a rewarding career.



Question: I am a third-year undergraduate student who plans to work in the business side of the fashion industry. I have contacted a number of large fashion retailers and have been turned down for internships because I am not in a fashion-marketing, co-op, or internship program because my school doesn't offer them. How can I gain experience in this field?

Answer: You are faced with the challenge of demonstrating an area of specialization/product knowledge—in your case, fashion—to complement your business focus.

Based on the feedback, you are right to assume that you have to acquire some direct experience to gain entry to this field. Because the traditional routes of a fashion-related major or a co-op are blocked for you, seek out more imaginative approaches to making contacts and learning the fashion side of the business. Attend fashion events or become a student member of a professional fashion association, for example, where you can hang out with fashion-industry pros and pick up on the nuances of the industry.

If you are competing for positions with fashion majors, it is wise to incorporate some of the relevant academic coursework into your portfolio. Check online or write to fashion-marketing programs for their curriculum, and arrange to take one class, even if it is Internet-based, so you can highlight fashion coursework on your resume.

Although your school doesn't offer a formal internship program, see if you can convince a local merchant to take you on as an intern. If large fashion retailers are putting up roadblocks, approach a smaller concern in the industry from a different angle. I recall one student who succeeded in setting up an internship with a local milliner in her tiny boutique shop. She had a fabulous experience, not only becoming part of the retail scene but making fashion contacts and getting an inside look at hat design.