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### Fashion Collaborations: Tools & Experiments

Collaboration is one of the most effective ways to develop and scale a business. In the world of fashion, joint projects help brands expand their audience, create newsworthy moments and increase sales. At the business conference of Central Asia Fashion Spring-2025, participants analysed real cases of successful collaborations, shared insights and discussed key strategies that make partnerships truly effective.

Oksana Shkrygunova, founder of the communications agency YOS Agency, head of the project on the national costume "Ulttyq" Sezim, opened the business session with a key question: how to understand when a brand is really ready for cooperation? This line can sometimes be very thin - a company may feel that the moment has come, but at the same time there is room for improvement and preparation. What are the criteria that help to determine the real readiness to collaborate?



The CAF business conference Spring -2025: (from left to right) Oksana Shkrygunova , Polina Geraskina

This question was answered in detail by independent PR consultant, Head of Fashion & Lifestyle at PR agency Gord Polina Geraskina: *«In order to successfully launch a collaboration, it is important to first prepare your brand. Clients often come to us with this request, but upon deeper analysis it becomes clear that they are not ready yet. The first key point is the brand platform. Before you start looking for partners, you need to have a clear understanding of who you are, what idea your brand conveys and where you are going. This is necessary so that the potential partner understands what the collaboration is and what it will lead to. The second aspect is the target audience. It is important not only to know them, but also to understand what kind of customers*

you want to attract. Collaboration is one of the most effective ways to extend your reach. However, the partner does not necessarily have to target the same audience.

Many luxury brands - such as Maison Margiela or Rick Owens - are collaborating with more mass-market brands, such as Converse. In this way, they enter new market segments and make the brand more accessible to a wider audience. The third factor is the internal readiness of the company. Collaboration is a win-win strategy where both partners benefit, from new social subscribers to increased sales. It is therefore important that you have already debugged key business processes and that all communication channels are working smoothly - the website, social networks, marketplaces and, if applicable, retail outlets. Only then will collaboration be effective and bring the expected results».

To illustrate, Polina Geraskina gave examples of successful non-standard collaborations: «One of these projects was the partnership between Gloria Jeans and Marie Claire, where a wellness event was organised. A health day for 20 inclusive managers was held at the Yoga Studio Theatre in Moscow. Participants were offered a vegetarian buffet, a blue bar and training for bloggers in the brand's sportswear. Thanks to this project, it was possible not only to attract the attention of the audience through social networks, but also to gain press coverage, as materials about the event were published in the media holding's publications. Another popular format is gastronomic cooperation. The restaurant market is developing rapidly, competition is fierce and establishments are fighting for the attention of customers through emotions and impressions. This is why joint projects with brands have become an effective tool: exclusive desserts are created, gifts are raffled, fashion shopping with stylists is organised. Collaborations with media personalities are also very effective. A striking example of this is the partnership between Gloria Jeans and Irina Shayk. In 2023, the model took part in the brand's advertising campaign. The launch took place in three stages, and from the very first stage, the campaign resonated with the largest federal and regional media, lifestyle publications and Telegram channels. Audience interest only grew, with users filming reviews, discussing promotional material and the brand actively using this news hook. Collaborating with a well-known personality with a good reputation can significantly increase marketing impact and awareness».

Choosing the right partner is key to a successful relationship. Reputation is very important. It is necessary to analyse how the brand is presented in the information space, what kind of feedback its products receive, whether there have been any crisis situations and how the company has dealt with them. Polina Geraskina warned the audience: «Collaboration is more than a joint project; it is a reputational partnership where both parties influence each other. If one partner faces issues with product quality, service, or negative media coverage, it can also impact the other brand. The second key aspect is brand alignment. Even when the aim of collaboration is to reach a new audience, brands should share similar values, brand vision, and visual codes. Aesthetics is critical, as content serves as a primary promotional tool. In practice, some brands appear compatible during discussions, only for their visual styles to prove too divergent after implementation, leading to dissatisfaction on one side. The third factor is operational resources. When established brands partner with emerging companies, it's worth noting that the latter may lack the staff needed to execute the project effectively. Numerous partnership formats exist that don't demand large budgets. Among the most popular are gastro collaborations. Despite being widely used, this format remains effective, particularly when it offers exclusivity or a client bonus. A notable example is the successful partnership between the Coffee Mania chain and the Oskelly platform. The campaign sparked immense excitement: visitors snapped up desserts shaped like designer bags and received promo codes, hoping to win coveted premium accessories in a raffle. Ultimately, the project garnered extensive coverage in the media and social media, with demand so overwhelming that organizers imposed purchase limits».

Entrepreneur, creative director, and partner of the FUZZZ brand, Chikhun Jong, shared insights on their collaboration with breakdance champion Amir Zakirov: «Our brand emphasizes practicality, comfort, and understated style. We aim to reflect these values through collaborations, including one with Kazakhstan's breakdance champion, Amir Zakirov. Breakdancing has yet to gain widespread recognition in Kazakhstan, but it enjoys popularity in key markets for us, such as Korea, France, Japan, and the USA. We saw this as an opportunity: to nurture breakdance culture in Kazakhstan while showcasing the quality and convenience of our clothing through professional dancers' performances. A pivotal moment in this partnership was the Paris Olympics, where Amir Zakirov represented Kazakhstan. We designed bespoke clothing for him, which he wore during the competition. This served not only as a significant marketing achievement but also as proof of our products' durability. Breakdancing demands dynamic movement, and our clothing must endure intense wear

*while remaining comfortable. The collaboration began with a personal meeting—we share aligned views and values, and together we aim to elevate our culture and style globally. Amir kickstarted the buzz by tagging us on social media, sparking the connection. This partnership attracted new followers, boosted sales, and sparked interest from other dancers eager to collaborate with a brand that prioritizes style, comfort, and functionality. Though breakdancing remains a niche, its growth potential is immense, and we view it as a promising avenue for future collaborations».*



Entrepreneur, creative director and partner of the FUZZZ brand Chikhun Jong

Saltanat Ibrayeva, founder of the consulting firm Retail Partners and the offline marketplace for Kazakhstani designers and brands, CoLab Multibrand, in Almaty, Astana, and Atyrau, outlined the distinction between commercial and image collaborations: *«Commercial collaborations focus on profit generation, with key metrics including sales, profitability, and return on investment. Image collaborations, however, prioritize boosting brand awareness, expanding reach, attracting new audiences, and shaping market positioning. Their success is gauged by media metrics such as reach, subscriber growth, and press mentions. In the post-Soviet space, the culture of collaborations is still emerging, often leading to inflated expectations. For instance, entrepreneurs might anticipate an influencer partnership will instantly skyrocket sales tenfold, only to fault the influencer when results fall short. Yet success hinges on multiple factors: how well the influencer’s audience aligns with the brand’s target market, the quality of content produced during the collaboration, and whether the product meets customer expectations. It’s critical that the product’s value surpasses its price. History offers numerous cases where collaborations failed to deliver due to subpar product quality».*

Saltanat Ibrayeva highlighted several successful collaborations that proved both image-enhancing and commercially lucrative. One standout is Jimmy Choo & Sailor Moon, targeting an audience nostalgic for the anime. Its popularity surged, with products selling out rapidly, sparking a second wave of demand. Another triumph is Miu Miu & New Balance, which captivated fans of both brands, blending their distinct appeals into a resounding success.

*«For retailers, collaborations serve not only to draw in new audiences but also to cut marketing expenses», - says Saltanat Ibrayeva. «However, before rolling out a large batch, testing the product is crucial. The optimal strategy is the drop model: start with a limited edition and scale up if it performs well. Today’s consumer demands instant gratification—they want it here and now. By uniting multiple brands on a single platform, enhancing event initiatives, and leveraging collaborations strategically, retailers can boost recognition and elevate revenue to new heights».*





Founder of the consulting company Retail Partners, offline marketplace of Kazakhstani designers and brands CoLab Multibrand in Almaty, Astana and Atyrau Saltanat Ibraeva

Bikchurova, a leading expert on clothing materials and the search for modern solutions in the selection of fabrics and accessories. She shared information about innovations in the fashion industry: *«In the field of fashion and design there are collaborations that are not on the surface. When we talk about partnerships, we usually think of working with designers, bloggers or celebrities. However, there are less obvious, but no less important forms of collaboration - for example, brands working with innovative laboratories that develop new materials. Such labs can provide brands with unique sustainable materials. The recycling of production waste, for example, is one of the key areas. Juice factories produce tonnes of orange pulp every year, which can be used in the textile industry. A start-up company has been set up to develop threads with unique properties from this pulp. These technologies can be implemented on the initiative of laboratories offering innovative solutions to brands, or the brands themselves can order the development of specific materials for their collections. In the textile industry, fabrics are being developed that mix different types of threads: some absorb moisture, others do not. As a result, during exercise, sweat is absorbed by certain areas of the fabric, creating hidden patterns, logos or inspirational phrases».*



Leading expert on materials for creating clothes and finding modern solutions in the selection of fabrics and accessories Anna Bikchurova

Anna Bikchurova gave examples of unusual collaborations using recycled orange pulp. One day, a researcher was driving past a juice factory and thought about the possibility of using the waste to make textile material. As a result, three universities from different European countries worked on the project for five years. The result was a partnership with the Salvatore Ferragamo brand, which included a unique scarf made from this material in its regular collections. Some brands have become iconic thanks to their innovations. Stone Island, for example, changed the approach to fabric processing by creating the Dye d garment technology. This technology gives garments a vintage effect when worn, making each product unique. Customers love this effect so much that they stay with the brand for many years. Stone Island has also developed an exclusive identification system for its products: there are closed collections with a black or graphite patch that can only be purchased through membership of a special club.

*«Club programmes and limited collections are becoming key marketing tools. Brands like Issey Miyake have made their innovative technologies a recognisable part of their DNA. Their unique pleating technique is instantly associated with the brand. Stella McCartney is renowned for her research into sustainable materials. One of her projects was the creation of a suit made from mushroom mycelium, an analogue of leather. The support of such initiatives by major brands, including Adidas, helps to develop the production of new materials, despite the large investment required. Another example of the impact of innovation on the industry is the use of nylon in luxury fashion. Prada spent a long time researching the market response before incorporating this material into its line, as luxury brands are traditionally associated with natural fabrics. They carried out detailed analysis and tested the product on focus groups before launching collections with nylon. Today, their innovative nylon has become iconic. In this way, innovations in fabrics and materials not only set trends, but also bring about fundamental changes in the fashion industry. History shows that many iconic wardrobe items - from Levi's jeans to new generations of synthetic fabrics - began with technological breakthroughs. And today, it is labs, start-ups and scientific research that continue to shape the future of fashion», - says Anna Bikchurova.*

Lyudmila Polyanina, CEO of the well-known Kazakh brand Salta, noted that in its 15 years on the market, the company has had many collaborations, most of which have been more image than commercial: *«One of the important areas of our work is the use of innovative fabrics. We carefully select materials that nobody else uses. For example, there is not a single Kazakh brand that would launch a collection with fabrics containing collagen from fish scales, or with a Scotchgard coating that repels dirt and stains - spilt coffee can be wiped off with a damp cloth without leaving a trace. We also have fabrics that do not absorb odours, with perfume capsules or a wrinkle-free structure. Neoprene is another interesting material. Although it is considered synthetic, it is breathable, moisture resistant and comfortable against the skin. We are constantly introducing such technologies, but unfortunately the Kazakh market is not always ready for them. For example, in 2021, when we introduced a collection with fabrics containing fish scale collagen, customers didn't understand the*



The CAF business conference Spring -2025: (from left to right) Anna Bikchurova, Lyudmila Polyanina



product at first. However, after the collection sold out and people had time to appreciate its properties, they began to contact us with requests to repeat the launch. So our collaborations often start to work for us after a while. The Kazakh market is developing slowly and this has to be taken into account in strategic planning».

In her speech, the expert also stressed the importance of understanding the difference between image and commercial projects. Image projects are most often the result of a desire to combine the efforts of two brands or ambassadors, but key strategic questions are not always taken into account: why is this necessary, what are the objectives, what are the risks: «Any successful collaboration should lead to growth, audience expansion and brand strengthening. If the aim is simply to get the name out there, it is important to think about the results in advance. One of the most striking examples is our collaboration with the Kazakhstan 2021 Olympic team. We won the tender to sew the parade uniform for the athletes and delegation taking part in the opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympic Games. It was an incredibly interesting experience, especially in the context of the post-covid trend towards a healthy lifestyle and the popularity of a sporty style. Our uniform was highly appreciated, even by the American Forbes magazine, which included it in its list of the 10 best uniforms in the history of the Olympic Games. Later, however, we faced an unexpected problem: after such a success, we began to receive offers of cooperation from boxers and other athletes - people who did not belong to our target group. As a result, we received a huge influx of non-targeted enquiries, and the Olympic uniform itself, which went on sale, proved to be unpopular with our main target group - women. Had we had a well-thought-out strategy, we could have planned the launch of the Olympic line, for example. Women Edition - clothing inspired by the Olympic uniform but adapted for everyday use. This approach is also used by other brands, such as Ralph Lauren, who think through the commercial side of such projects. This experience has taught us the importance of hybrid collaborations that combine image and commercial value.

An image collaboration is a way of making a name for yourself in the market by working with a more famous and influential partner. This format also helps to renew a brand that is stagnating or in decline. Examples of such collaborations include Gucci and The North Face, Louis Vuitton and Supreme. In such cases, the focus is on image rather than commercial success. In most cases, however, brands seek a hybrid format that combines image and commercial objectives.

«When developing a commercial collaboration, you need to understand what the project will be about, who we will be working with, whether our audiences and values match, whether the age segment is similar. Then you need to define a strategy and think through the risks. Risks are inevitable in such projects. Even a successful collaboration can turn into a crisis if one of the partners gets into a scandalous situation. For example, following Kanye West's controversial comments, his collaboration with Adidas led to serious reputational and financial damage for the brand. It is therefore important for companies to think through possible consequences and ways out of difficult situations in advance. Another important aspect is post-collaboration. If the project is successful, it is important to understand in advance whether it will be continued,



Participants of the business conference of the International Fashion Exhibition Central Asia Fashion Spring-2025 analyzed real cases of successful collaborations

*in what form and how it will be organised. Strategic planning should include three scenarios: optimistic, realistic and pessimistic. This approach allows the brand to adapt quickly in case of failure and minimise possible losses», - concludes Lyudmila Polyanina.*

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