

FROM IDEA TO COMMERCIALLY SUCCESSFUL COLLECTION: HOW TO CREATE A PRODUCT THAT THE MARKET DEMANDS

How do you create collections that not only inspire but also sell? How do you find the balance between creativity and commerce, analyze demand, and make product decisions based on data? The experts of the business conference at the 38th International Fashion Exhibition Central Asia Fashion Autumn-2026 explored practical tools and real-world fashion brand case studies.

The session was moderated by Natalya Mironova, Program Director of Central Asia Fashion and Director of Business Programs at ProFashion. She opened the session by asking: «How is a new collection created, and what guides you first — inspiration, your own taste, or the market?» Linara Ablayeva, founder of the womenswear brand Lalina, was the first to respond: *«Of course, it all starts with the idea of creating something for yourself. For about two or three years I sewed exclusively for myself, and then my friends started noticing the pieces, asking about them, and gradually the first demand emerged. We began to scale, but over time I noticed that the value I was offering through clothing didn't quite match the expectations of the audience we were originally targeting. We were offering clothing to the Kazakhstani market but realized that our customers' needs were somewhat different — they responded more to relaxed and comfortable clothing. We live in an era of comfort, when people want to wear things more than once and not only for a specific occasion. So, we made a bet on versatility. Clients love that our pieces can be reworn, mixed with other garments, and used to create different looks. That's how our core style and signature line took shape — pieces you can wear day after day, discovering new combinations each time. And I want to highlight an important nuance for those thinking about building their own product: it's not just about investing in marketing, but about understanding the real value you deliver to the client. You're not just selling clothes — you're offering a solution to a specific need. For example, a woman comes to you with a particular request: she wants to feel comfortable, find a flattering fit, highlight her best features, and create a look that makes her feel confident. So, the brand's task is to create a piece that answers those needs, helps the person feel at ease, and emphasizes her strengths. In the end, we're not selling a thing — we're selling a solution to the client's specific challenge. And if someone gets exactly the result they wanted, they*



Linara Ablayeva, founder of the womenswear brand Lalina

come back. Right now, our top priorities are quality and natural fabrics, because it's always a pleasure to wear something that benefits you not only in terms of appearance, but also in terms of comfort and how it feels».

Olesya Ladygina, Director of the Bishkek sewing factory Bravo and «Mrs. Kyrgyzstan-2026», has nearly 30 years of experience in garment creation, as well as experience developing original collections. In her view, the idea behind a collection is worthless on its own: *«It only becomes successful when it turns into a product that people are willing to buy, that generates profit, and that keeps customers coming back. For example, when it came to the designer collection I created for Paris Fashion Week, its foundation was the idea of a woman. I didn't start by choosing fabric or silhouettes — I started with an image of a woman. Today it's very fashionable to talk about the stylish, fashionable woman, but I chose to build around the dignified woman — one who isn't afraid to be noticed. And only after that came the silhouettes, the fabrics, the embroidery, and gradually the collection took shape. So, I want to emphasize: inspiration alone is no longer enough. Every designer and manufacturer must understand the economics of the product. When I have an idea for a new collection, I first ask myself: «Who will wear my pieces? Where will they be sold? How much is the client willing to pay?» And only then comes the analysis. I study sales figures, talk to clients, analyze trends, and constantly work on developing my eye. And perhaps that's exactly what sets me apart from many designers: I am simultaneously the director of a sewing factory, which means I see the difference between creating a beautiful collection and creating a commercially successful product. A good designer wants to create a beautiful, powerful collection. A good entrepreneur wants to make a profit. And sometimes those two things don't align, which is why in reality we have to combine the qualities of both a good designer and a good entrepreneur. A talented designer can create a beautiful collection, but a commercially successful one is built by a team — a technologist, a marketer, a manufacturer, the entire production team, and of course the seamstresses. But at the head of that process can stand the designer themselves».*



Olesya Ladygina, Director of Bravo sewing factory (Bishkek), «Mrs. Kyrgyzstan-2026»

Kuralai Nurkadilov, founder of the Kuralai Haute Couture House, has been in the profession since 1994 and has witnessed all the shifts in the Kazakhstani fashion industry firsthand. The celebrated designer and artist understands from personal experience how work on a collection is structured

today: «I was fortunate to experience the Soviet production system and to work in factories that later literally collapsed before my eyes. I would distinguish between two types: the designer-stylist and the designer-artist. It all depends on what kind of collections you create and what development strategy you choose. If you take the path of the designer-artist who sets the trends themselves, that is already a powerful marketing move. You need to build your own name, create recognizability, and of course have a distinctive personal signature. If you are a designer-stylist, it's easier to work with mass production and the commercial market, because you can focus on current trends, follow them, quickly adapt them, and enter the market almost immediately after those who already shaped those trends. You can borrow ideas, interpret them, and adapt them to your audience. For an artist, it's harder in that sense. But the artist builds their own name, which stays with them for many years, and that becomes the DNA of their brand. In both cases, however, a distinctive DNA and recognizability must be developed. Unfortunately, this is far from always visible in contemporary collections. Sometimes you get a real patchwork: one style today, another tomorrow, a third aesthetic in the next collection — and all of it built on borrowing from others. Yet every brand still needs its own signature. You have to find it, build it, and develop it consistently. And I completely agree that even if you are an artist creating an original collection, today it is impossible to exist without a team. A commercially successful collection is not made by the designer alone. Its development involves people who handle sales, production, and marketing, and who analyze audience response. Their opinions matter too, because the goal is not simply to satisfy your own ego and create what you personally like. Ultimately, the collection needs to be sold — so we always consult with our team, listen to their input, and factor in different perspectives when creating a collection».



Kuralai Nurkadilov, founder of the Kuralai Haute Couture House

Meruert Shakerbaeva, founder and designer of the ShakerBaY brand, believes that once the creator of a collection finds points of connection with consumers, the collection practically comes to life on its own: «The world has changed; people's needs have become far more grounded and specific. We don't need extraordinary capabilities — we need solutions for everyday life: things that help us orient ourselves faster, get ready faster, choose clothes more easily, and understand what actually suits us. Our brand works through the DNA of the person. We define the psychological profile of our client, know our target audience well, understand their age, lifestyle, and key preferences. So, comfort, natural fabrics, interesting designs, and functionality remain our top priorities. Our collections are born from that understanding of the client. I am the founder and designer of the brand; our team

includes two clothing designers and two jewelry designers. The original philosophy was this: a woman shouldn't spend a lot of time searching for a look, because everyone has so little time as it is. She comes to us and can put together a complete, ready-to-wear look. We even tried working with partners to create footwear, but unfortunately that project didn't work out. However, all the accessories and jewelry needed for a full look we make ourselves. A client leaves us completely ready — she doesn't need to search for anything else in other stores. We used to focus almost entirely on design, with very little involvement in sales or production; we had a few production workshops and our partners handled the selling. When the pandemic hit, we realized that format no longer worked. We still don't have our own production facility, but we now work with four workshops that we selected very carefully. Each specializes in a particular type of garment: some work well with silk, others with velvet, others with outerwear. We distribute the collection among them so that each workshop has the time to produce our required runs with quality and on schedule. As for external sales, we have moved away from them entirely and now sell everything ourselves; about 95% of our sales happen online. Our team now has 7 people. We have our own showroom, but we don't open separate offline locations and aren't represented in other stores. After we switched to direct sales, they grew threefold, because we know our audience and understand what they want. The partners we worked with before were certainly good at their job, but they could never know our client as deeply as we do. Direct contact with clients is very important to us. We constantly communicate with them, hold client days, and invite them to events. I travel to different cities for pop-up showrooms myself, and that delivers nearly a hundred percent return, because it is direct contact and dialogue with the client».



Meruert Shakerbaeva, founder and designer of the ShakerBaY brand

Olesya Ladygina added that the family brand Bravo was founded in 1996, started by five people, and even with such a small team they achieved large wholesale sales: «Back then we specialized not so much in original designer collections as in capsule collections and mass-market clothing. Around 2010 there was a true golden era for garment production. In a single month we could earn around \$10,000 — an incredible sum at the time, and still a very significant one today. And that was precisely when we understood something important: if you correctly identify your target audience, it is genuinely capable of driving large sales. The interesting thing is that at first we sewed almost everything we personally liked, and only later began to gradually understand what our clients actually needed. As a result, we

built huge wholesale groups — around five groups of 300 people each. You can imagine what kind of wholesale volume that represented! Now we are gradually transitioning to a retail format, creating our own collections, tracking trends, and developing the brand in a new direction. And most importantly, I personally only ever wear pieces from our own brand — I have such deep respect for this work, for the work of my parents, my family. Another important topic for us is inclusivity. We produce pieces up to size 70. It's very important that every woman can find clothing that fits her with us. After performing in Paris, I finally understood one thing definitively: the runway brings recognition, but commercial success is created by the people who wear your clothes».

Linara Ablayeva reminded the audience that for a collection to be successful, the sales process must be well-organized: «Creating the product itself accounts for a maximum of 40% of success. What matters far more is what happens next: how well the person consulting the client can present the collection correctly, convey its value, and explain the specifics of the product. It is ultimately the employee who interacts directly with the buyer who largely determines whether the sale will happen. That's why I pay enormous attention to what exactly employees say to clients and how they say it. I personally write specific scripts for the team so that a consultant can tell the story of the product correctly: explain its purpose, its features, the fabric composition, demonstrate its advantages, and help the client understand why this purchase will genuinely be valuable to them. What matters to me is that the person doesn't simply hear: «This is a great piece». They need to understand why it's great specifically for them, feel its distinctive qualities, and see its practical value — including in terms of comfort and how it makes them feel. So, I place a strong emphasis on staff training. They shouldn't just sell — they need to understand the product and be able to speak about it eloquently. For example, we have an employee who consults clients even after midnight. Because after 10 pm — and sometimes after midnight — many women finally have time for themselves: they finish work, put the children to bed, wrap up all their tasks, open social media or marketplaces, and start browsing. And many immediately write to us on WhatsApp for additional consultation. Of course, we're always ready to help, because a client who writes at that moment is most often already interested in making a purchase. That's a warm lead, and it's crucial to respond right there and then, not to put the conversation off until the next day».



Natalya Mironova, Program Director of Central Asia Fashion, Director of Business Programs at ProFashion

Meruert Shakerbaeva shared another secret of commercially successful collections — pieces that can be worn for many years while the look changes each time: *«We start developing the next collection long before the current one launches. That is, the seasonal collection hasn't come out yet, and we're already working on the next one: testing pieces, watching the audience's reaction, and understanding in advance what will actually be in demand. In summer we work on the New Year's capsule. It's always more festive, so we test the pieces ahead of time and show them on Instagram. Women react immediately, asking: «What is that? Where is that skirt from? Where is that dress from?» They pick up very quickly on what they actually want. And from that reaction we already know which piece has the potential to become popular. We have a real bestseller, for example — a reversible skirt. We love creating reversible pieces in general; they serve a woman for a long time and can be worn in different ways. The skirt can change not only in color but also in size. This is especially relevant for our audience — women 45+ — and I know their needs well. At that age, body changes can happen quite quickly, so the ability to adapt a piece to yourself is a major advantage. When one skirt can change both its color and its size, that's a very precise match to a woman's needs. We've had reversible skirts, reversible dresses, trousers, and even coats. For a woman it is especially important not to create unnecessary expenses, but to choose practical, high-quality, and stylish pieces that truly work for her».*

Linara Ablayeva continued on the theme of «all-occasion» pieces: *«We live in the age of Instagram, and after every event, wedding, or outing a person is photographed in a new look and then often doesn't want to wear the same piece again. So, our task is to make it as versatile as possible and give people the opportunity to reimagine a familiar look in a new way. Collections should be foundational and easy to mix with other clothing. The woman herself can always transform the look with accessories, and the same piece will look completely different. When we present a piece to a client, we try to show several styling options right away, so she understands where and how she can wear it. It could be a restaurant, a visit to her parents, a social event, or a casual dinner out with friends. What matters to us is that the piece is versatile and doesn't become a «one-time-only» item. As for color palette, there's a specific nuance there as well. I had this experience early on, when I personally loved bright, colorful pieces. But colorful clothing doesn't suit everyone. A lot depends on personality and psychological type. For example, a more energetic and self-assured person who enjoys attention and isn't afraid to stand out will more likely choose vivid shades — red, green, raspberry, and other*



CAF business conference speakers (left to right): Natalya Mironova, Meruert Shakerbaeva, Olesya Ladygina, Linara Ablayeva, Kuralai Nurkadilov

saturated colors. That kind of clothing becomes an extension of their personality. A calmer or more cautious audience tends to choose neutral and dark tones. So, when we analyze demand in Kazakhstan, we see that the majority of our audience prefers foundational collections in a restrained color palette. And we naturally take that nuance into account when creating new collections».

Closing the session, Kuralai Nurkadilov spoke with particular warmth about the ultimate measure of success: *«For me, it's this — when more than twenty years later I hear that someone still has my trousers or other pieces hanging in their wardrobe. They hold their shape, fit beautifully even after many washes, and look as though they were sewn just recently. And it is especially precious when the third or fourth generation of clients comes to you. Young women whose mothers once bought clothing from you now come in for their wedding dresses. In those moments, even as I involuntarily think about how the years fly by, I understand that this is what true recognition looks like».*

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