



# ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS A KEY TOOL FOR NEW BRANDS

Emerging designers are using technology to build their brands, connect with customers, and blaze new trails in high fashion.

From artificial intelligence, young fashion designers find technology gives them an edge in an unforgiving business

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Sustainable Clothing Designer

Shweta Lakhani has no illusions about breaking into the world of fashion.

The 23-year-old Parsons School of Design graduate knows the cutthroat industry is notoriously difficult to crack. From the high costs of raw materials to the difficulty of getting noticed in a crowded, competitive field, aspiring designers face a daunting array of obstacles.

Like making it big in the film business or the recording industry, success in fashion hinges on a mysterious mixture of talent, training, determination, and luck.

Nor is it lost on Lakhani that she is joining an industry in the midst of upheaval. Technology has forced massive change on traditional retail, and the arena she is preparing to enter is swirling with uncertainty.

But that's a good thing, according to Lakhani.

Lakhani, a designer of sustainable clothing, is part of a cohort of emerging designers who see opportunity where others might see only turbulence. Technology is the root cause of retail's current state of turmoil, but Lakhani knows technology will play an essential role in her career as it unfolds in the coming years.

“I use [tools] that would be like having superpowers 10 or 15 years ago,” Lakhani said.

In September, Lakhani was one of several emerging designers who showcased their work last fall in New York City using by REVEAL, an innovative popup shop created by a student at Harvard's Graduate School of Design.

With a footprint of only 36 square feet, the portable boutique bristles with behind-the-scenes technologies designed to both improve the customer

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experience and furnish retailers with nearly real-time insights.

The by REVEAL outing was instructive for Lakhani, who was thrilled with the chance to show her designs to a new category of customers.

“I don’t know of another platform that would allow young designers to show their work in that way,” said Lakhani.

Kay Unger, a fashion designer who found renown in a different era, contrasts her early experiences with those of Lakhani’s generation. This digitally savvy group, armed with powerful new technologies, have different means to identical ends: personalization.

“My way of social networking was that I would travel 30 weeks a year and do personal appearances in department stores all over the country,” Unger recalled. “This allowed me to get to know my customer, see how she fit, what her needs were.”

Today’s up-and-comers still have to show up in person, network relentlessly, and understand what their customers want even before they do, but technology can make it easier for one person to do all that and still have the time to sketch, create, dream.

Just as by REVEAL’s in-store sensors yield a trove of valuable information to Lakhani and the other emerging designers, a new wave of technologies can supercharge and simplify essential retail processes. This is good news for all retailers, established and emerging alike. But when you are just starting out, when it’s only you and your gumption taking on an industry, these tools can make all the difference.

Perhaps no other new technology holds as much promise for emerging designers as artificial intelligence.

Consider FINDMINE. It helps customers complete outfits by suggesting other items to buy based on an initial purpose.

Let’s say someone purchased a shirt from Lakhani’s sustainable clothing line on an e-commerce site. FINDMINE’s AI-based platform could be used to serve up a menu of additional garments and accessories to “complete the look.” The company currently delivers 4.5 million recommendations a day.

Just like by REVEAL, FINDMINE returns to the retailer a wealth of valuable data about customer preference and behavior that can be used to improve sales and service.

“Every successful retailer will be using artificial intelligence in 10 years,” said Ryan Parker, General Manager of Responsive Retail, Retail Solutions Group, Intel. “In many ways, they will be catching up to the brands just starting now, who have

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One of the biggest challenges for new brands is a lack of human resources; there simply aren't enough people and hours in the day to accomplish everything that needs to be done. AI can shoulder some of the burden, especially in the realm of customer management and personalization.

Chatbots, programs that answer customer questions online in instant messaging tools or on mobile devices via text messages, are proving to be powerful tools for engaging shoppers and delivering personalized customer experiences.

“While it may be impossible to provide the staff necessary to answer every question, for questions that are asked often, chatbots can provide the right answer to a customer in real time,” Parker said.

Intel is collaborating with Banter, which allows “conversational commerce” between retailers and their customers using text messages, Facebook Messenger, or Twitter. The platform uses both humans and artificial intelligence to deliver seamless, convenient, and satisfying customer experiences.

Katy Unger said the Banter approach is the right one when it comes to striking a balance between machines and people. “People will always want a personal touch,” Unger said.

Young designers can also use AI and advanced analytics to sell more. Consider FINDMINE. It helps customers complete outfits by suggesting other items to buy based on an initial purpose.

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