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Over exposure

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Taking a bite out of fashion marketing

Homer Simpson once said, “You don’t make friends with salad.” But McDonald’s is using the launch of its new menu of caesars, Mediterranean greens and spicy Thai bowls to get chummy with the city’s fashion community.

The company has tapped a trio of style authorities including CityLine [<http://www.cityline.ca>] stylist Lisa Rogers and designer Lucian Matis [<http://www.lucianmatis.com>] to blog on FashionFlavour.ca [<http://www.fashionflavour.ca>]. Topics cover the usual dos-and-don’ts and body type dressing tips (“Tall and thin women can pull off skinny jeans with tanks,” report Kavi Kavi [<http://www.kavikavi.com>] sisters Dipika, Ravika and Monika Gupta) and none of the style advice is actually salad-related (perhaps “what to do if you spill ranch dressing all over your lap” is coming soon?).

It’s a pretty curious cross promotion and I can just hear the McDonald’s marketing people floating the idea with the designers. No doubt the benefit of exposure was a big part of the pitch.

Exposure is dangled like a gilded carrot in front of designers of all disciplines. The Sunday New York Times ran a story [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/15/business/media/15illo.html?_r=3] this weekend about illustrators who were asked by Google to contribute figures for its new web browser.

Toronto (and sometimes NOW) illustrator Gary Taxali [<http://www.garytaxali.com>] says in the piece that when he asked Google about compensation, the company, which according to the Times made \$1.42 billion in the first quarter of 2009, said there was none.

In response to a backlash from the illustrator community, Google said, “We believe these projects provide a unique and exciting opportunity for artists to display their work in front of millions of people.”

In other words, exposure!

Taxali turned down the offer but Toronto’s fashion designer community isn’t always so quick to say no. They are bombarded with requests for a dress for this charity auction or that red carpet-bound celebrity. “It’ll be great,” they’re told. “She’ll say your name on ETalk! [<http://watch.ctv.ca/etalk/#clip182383>]”

It’s hard to overlook offers of exposure when your marketing budget is miniscule and there are examples of savvy designers carving out second careers of making dresses out of chocolate [<http://cadburycouture.ca>] and bathroom tissue [<http://www.cashmere.ca/wcc/2008>].

Bustle [<http://www.bustleclothing.com>] has collaborated on collections with Vespa, Audi and Belvedere vodka. Jeremy Laing [<http://www.jeremylaing.com>] created pieces [<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/style/a-match-made-in-venice/article1149460>] for the Canadian contingent at this month’s Venice Biennale.

The trick is finding the right partner. Even if Laing didn't get paid a penny, previewing his fall looks in front of the Biennale's fashion faces [http://www.style.com/peopleparties/parties/scoop/global-060409_punta_della_dogana_opening] makes marketing sense for both him and the curators.

The McDonalds-Lucian Matis connection, on the other hand, is more perplexing than synergistic. A Matis pink silk crepe shingles dress we ran in our Fashion Issue [<http://www.nowtoronto.com/lifestyle/story.cfm?content=168423&archive=28,28,2009>] cost \$895 by special order at Magnolia [<http://www.magnoliaonline.ca>] on Eglinton. It's been a while since I ate a chicken nugget with Mayor McCheese at the top of the Playland slide, but I doubt many fast foodies are chasing their cheeseburger (or salad) with a custom dress fitting.



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