

# HOW TO MAKE IT IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY



FANCY SWAPPING YOUR OFFICE JOB FOR A GLAM CAREER IN THE FASHION WORLD? HERE, INDUSTRY INSIDERS SHARE THEIR TIPS ON BREAKING INTO THE BIZ

Written by Aoife Stuart Madge

## BECOMING A STYLIST

As with most jobs in fashion, to become a stylist, you have to be prepared to start at the bottom. Stylist to the stars Rachel Zoe has styled everyone from Cameron Diaz to Anne Hathaway and Jennifer Garner, but her first job was as a fashion assistant on a now defunct New York-based magazine. These days, competition is so fierce that you'll often have to work for free in the beginning, just to get a foot in the door.

Alicja Jasnikowska, a London-based freelance fashion stylist who has worked in TV, advertising and editorial for 10 years, says: "An unpaid internship is essential. It teaches you the skills you need when doing a shoot and how to navigate an often tricky industry. As an intern, work hard, be unique, give your opinion but don't enforce it and offer to help out with anything, no matter how trivial it may seem. That will help you stand out from the crowd."

The most important skill required to succeed in the job is passion – and only those who live, breathe and consume fashion survive. When Zoe quit her magazine job to pursue a freelance career at the age of 25, it was her sheer dedication that drove her. "I worked 20-something hours a day, seven days a week," she says. "I was completely obsessed with fashion and spent all my money flying to Paris to go to couture because that was the dream."

Zoe's secret weapon for success? Amazing networking skills. "I crashed shows, stood in line for Marc Jacobs," she says. "Designers were my heroes and my celebrities. It hasn't really worn off."

Alicja explains that networking is essential to make it in the fashion industry: "Most people I know in fashion got their jobs through contacts they have made. I landed my current agent by taking my portfolio and knocking on doors. Don't give up at the first hurdle, if you really are sure you want to do this as a career. It can take a while to get to where you want to be."

While the job itself does have its perks (goodie bags and discount cards) it's not all glamour. "The reality is running around for eight hours, often with a number of heavy bags hanging from your arms," says Alicja. "Doing returns

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## features/insider tips

is probably the least glamorous aspect of the job – it's like unpacking after a holiday – and steaming the clothes before a shoot. But the satisfaction of seeing a shoot finally coming together and looking great makes all the hard work worthwhile."

**Course in the UAE:** Principals of Fashion Styling at The London College of Fashion, Dubai Campus. Visit [fashion.arts.ac.uk](http://fashion.arts.ac.uk)

### BECOMING A MODEL

When it comes to making it as a model, there are certain physical prerequisites that will get you noticed. But, as former supermodel and *Britain & Ireland's Next Top Model* host Elle Macpherson explains, being beautiful is not enough. "Some of the requirements are obviously the physical attributes, so tall, broad shoulders, well-proportioned head, great smile and skin, long legs etc. Physically, there is a presence that is quite typical of this industry," she says. "Then there are the girls that have heart and spirit and soul that really comes out during their photographs or in their face or in the way they dress. It's a combination of spirit and physical stature."

When it comes to conveying that spirit on camera, it's all down to practice. Stef Buchan and Sara Allen, senior bookers at UAE-based model agency Bareface, explain: "Practice which poses and angles work best for you in front a mirror, flick through fashion magazines, and replicate several flattering poses. Learn how to position and move your body. It's important to be fluid and not scared of trying new moves."

Finding the right agency is key to any model's career success. If you are signed, you'll speak to your agent several times a day, so you need to make sure there is mutual trust there. For Elle, enrolling at Sydney modelling agency Chadwick's led to her signing with Click Model Management in New York – where she enjoyed a 25-year reign in the industry. "When you are first starting out as a model, see as many different agencies as possible. Do your research to make sure that they are a credible company," says Stef. "If a ridiculous amount of money is being asked for just to sign up, be wary!"

Ultimately, it's your portfolio that's going to get you noticed, and less is definitely more. "It's better to have eight strong images in your book rather than 20 that don't show you at your best," says Sara. At castings, dress simply with minimal make-up, and be courteous. "A professional attitude is paramount," says Stef. "The modelling industry is tiny and word gets around. If you're consistently late or rude on set this will impact heavily the next time a client is choosing a model. You need to be hard working, humble yet confident and have a flexible mindset."

It's important to have a thick skin to work as a model as you will encounter countless rejections. But it's also important to remember that the job is about more than just showing up and looking pretty. "My advice to young aspiring models would be to get an education," says Elle. "It's much more interesting for girls to be educated and be beautiful because there are a lot of simply pretty girls out there. The ones who get ahead are the ones who have a curiosity, a flexibility and a natural instinct with some cultural understanding, plus a willingness to learn."

**Course in the UAE:** Bareface Academy runs a comprehensive model course that explains how the industry works. [bareface.com](http://bareface.com)

### BECOMING A FASHION DESIGNER

While a talent for design is a given, to become a fashion designer business nous is also required. Designer Diane Von Furstenberg says the secret to her international success is a passion for fashion and business. "I love to design and see the beauty in everything. I am always designing in my head," she says. "But, I also have a business in mind. I have always asked myself, 'what do women want?' and then I give that to them."

Reema Al Banna, the designer behind UAE-based label Reemami, agrees and would encourage aspiring designers to back up a professional

qualification – such as a BA in fashion design or pattern drafting – with a minor in business or management. "You need a strong business sense, and knowledge of marketing, sales and production," says Reema. "You must be very passionate about fashion, highly creative, and always coming up with new ideas, not just for fashion designs but for advertising and public relations with every collection. In order to create a strong brand, each collection must be coherent in colours, cut and styles – and everything from the brand logos, colours and fonts can help the brand stand out."

When it comes to brand identity, they don't come must stronger than DVF's signature wrap dresses. "The fabric inspired the dresses," says Furstenberg. "This great jersey fabric that does not wrinkle and can mould the body. Women of course inspire all of my designs. And, I was drawn to the fabric because it was something I would wear. I never design anything I would not wear."

This single-minded belief in your product is key to success says Reema. "A successful fashion designer has to be unique and individual, and not just follow the crowd," she says. "You need to be persistent, passionate about the job and never stop trying. It's a bumpy ride and you need to strive to become a well-know brand."

**Course in the UAE:** Fashion Design at the French Fashion University, ESMOD, [esmod-dubai.com](http://esmod-dubai.com)

### BECOMING A PHOTOGRAPHER

Photographing gorgeous models in glamorous locations may seem like a pipe dream, but if you've got an eye for photography and an interest in fashion, it's not as unreachable as it seems. In the internet age, the industry is booming, so there is plenty of scope for new talent to break into the expanding market. The most important thing is that you have a passion for what you do.

Legendary photographer Mario Testino is known for photographing the world's most famous and beautiful people, but it was the basic desire to carve a career out of doing something he loved that kick-started his career. "The year has 365 days and I want each and every one of them to be exciting," he says. So the Peruvian-born photographer started taking snapshots of his friends, who he dubbed "the weirdos of Lima".

Dubai-based fashion photographer Tina Chang has worked on campaigns for leading brands, including Louis Vuitton, Dior and Chanel. She says this kind of determination and dedication are the only way to get ahead. "It's important to have a good understanding and love of the industry," she says. "You have to be very determined. Fashion photography is one of the hardest to break in and stay in."

A starting point would be to get a professional qualification in photography, then it's all about building up a solid portfolio of work, says Tina. "An internship is very important. You will gain a lot of hands on experiences during an internship, something that will not be offered in a classroom," she says. "Your portfolio should be quality over quantity. Be concise. And be confident and stand behind your work." These days, she says, it's imperative to have a website to showcase your work. "It allows you to reach potential clients all over the world," she says.

For Testino, taking some pictures of his friends led to a commission to photograph the late Princess Diana, so consistently producing great work will get you noticed. "Be patient, be persistent and work hard," says Tina.

While the payoffs are great ("You get to travel the world and meet interesting people," says Tina), you must be prepared to get your hands dirty – often literally. "It is not all glamour. We spend hours in prepping and researching before each shoot," says Tina. "Shoot day is usually long. And sometimes we have to get down and dirty just to have a beautiful shoot."

**Course in the UAE:** Fashion Photography at the French Fashion University, ESMOD, [esmod-dubai.com](http://esmod-dubai.com) ■