

# The Business of BLOGGING

*The Business of Fashion's Imran Amed  
on maximising the might of digital media and how to get  
noticed in the all-important feed*



With 185,000 Twitter followers and more than 150,000 visitors to his website each month, Imran Amed, founder and editor of the Business of Fashion, has become one of the most influential digital ambassadors to the fashion world. The internet is awash with readers, bloggers and information. But what does it take to make an impression – or even turn a profit – in this fast-moving landscape? Stephanie LaCava spends the day with the BoF boffin to discover how to make the most of the power of the blog.

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Before he has even sat down for breakfast at his table in the corner of the Crillon dining room, Imran Amed has already run into several acquaintances. There's Lillian von Stauffenberg, and then Jean-Pierre Blanc of the Hyères Festival of photography and fashion. This is just a first glimpse of Amed's vast network of contacts. 'My organic web of relationships, ranging from the CEOs of fashion brands to 15-year-old bloggers to streetstyle photographers like Phil [Oh], is powerful inspiration as an editorial tool,' he says as chooses a breakfast of yoghurt topped with granola and a cappuccino: 'I have to stay healthy.' He's about to enter the fourth and final leg of Fashion Week; get sick and you're down half a year's recon and liaisons. Despite the marathon, the 35-year-old, ponytailed writer and consultant looks rested and dapper.

Amed's wearing a striking tan suit jacket which looks custom-made for his five-foot-four frame. It was Alister Mackie who referred him to the Portobello Road dealer specialising in Seventies Neapolitan tailoring where he bought it. As he reaches for his coffee cup, his watch shows beneath his sleeve: a rare vintage Heuer Carrera from the Sixties. 'A friend who I 100 per cent trust when it comes to watches helped me find it,' he says. 'That's how I do things now. You can't be an expert

Upon graduation, Amed moved back to London for a job in management consulting, followed by a short-lived exploration of fashion venture capitalism. 'For a variety of different reasons that didn't work out and I changed direction,' he says, though in the meantime he'd realised his talent for working with creative people. He'd also learned a great deal about how the fashion business worked and discovered the fashion blogosphere, which was just forming at the time.

'Without structure around the creative process, a fashion business is not viable,' says Mesh Chhibber, managing partner of Relative MO. 'There are loads of vanity-inspired investment bankers who want to be in the business, who want the lifestyle of working with a large luxury group, because it's sexy, but they don't understand the process. Whereas Imran actually understands creative people – that's the major difference.'

In 2007, while working as a consultant, Amed started a blog from his sofa. 'I wasn't firing on all cylinders,' he says of his day job. He used his site to record his observations of the business of luxury. In six months, word was out and The Business of Fashion was born. 'It just spread. If you create content that people find compelling, they share it.' Amed set up

amalgamation of content culled through Amed's conversations and encounters, many with the individuals active behind the scenes. On this day in Paris, it's only 11:15am and he has already run into a few players that will find their way into the round-up. He finishes his cappuccino and it's onward to the basement of the Palais Tokyo for the Zac Posen show.

Upon arrival, Amed stops to greet Vanessa Friedman of the *Financial Times*, his first print editor, his friend the *International Herald Tribune's* Jessica Michault and Imogen Fox of *The Guardian*, whom he's only just met. The show is about to begin; Amed takes his front-row seat and Anna della Russo stops to say hello. 'Anna's an example of someone from a background of old media—a legacy, if you want to call it that— who's embraced digital media in a way that works for her,' he comments later. 'Street style has become powerful. People like Anna know how to use it.'

Amed takes out his iPhone as the show starts and holds it up to snap a picture of the first look. 'It's to leverage excitement about the runway show,' he says. 'I'm not sitting around tweeting profit numbers.' He takes another Twitpic, this one of Posen's constructed evening dresses. Amed's well aware of the importance of BofF's Twitter, as his own

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in everything, so I leverage the expertise of my friends. They've helped me to curate my life.' Amed's business acumen and professionalism come through in his measured answers. There's nothing frivolous about him.

'I wasn't thirsting for couture in Calgary,' Amed says of his childhood in Canada. Rather than magazines, he chose to read books by the likes of Ian McEwan. 'He gets in people's heads, understands the way certain characters think.' This is one of Amed's skills as well.

Despite no formal training in fashion, there is a well-honed eye behind both Amed's work, and his look. Slung over the back of his chair is an avant-garde-practical Junya Watanabe for Macintosh coat. He co-designed the Calgary bag, which he is carrying, with Bill Amberg, the collaboration prompted by a CNN spot filmed at Amberg's Burlington Arcade store. The model is named after Amed's hometown. He's big on national pride – only fitting, considering the large London-based, Canadian-bred fashion contingent: Erdem (Montreal), Todd Lynn (Toronto), Mark Fast (Winnipeg). Jak and Jill's Tommy Ton is also one of the tribe, though his primary residence is still Toronto. Amed attended university in Quebec at McGill before leaving Canada to live in London and then decamp for the States to pursue an MBA at Harvard.

a daily email for subscribers, which allowed him to see who was visiting the site. 'I was wowed: they were really important people in the industry.' There are now 15,000 daily newsletter subscribers. Still, Amed says, 'I don't think of myself as a journalist.'

The Business of Fashion is best known for its consolidation of the daily deluge of fashion news. 'We are curators. Aggregators don't differentiate, they just aggregate,' says Amed. 'We carefully select the best of what is out there to share with our readers. We don't write news – others do a great job of that. We write analysis.' In 2009, The Business of Fashion debuted a well-received interview video series, beginning with a conversation with Giles Deacon. Amed chose to highlight the following three questions: how did he decide to become designer? What's the fuel for his creative process? How does he manage his business? A similar piece featuring Natalie Massenet was an instant internet hit. 'The people we talk to and feature are talented and professional, and are not necessarily written about elsewhere in this way. The media sometimes portrays fashion as a vapid, superficial, glossy industry, more about champagne than substance.'

The Business of Fashion's seasonal review is not a critique of shows, rather an

news intake is guided by what appears on his phone's Twitter feed.

'Everyone cares most about what's in their feed. Facebook feed, Twitter feed, the content that blogs or websites produce... Advertising is extraneous to all that. For advertising to work effectively, it must be relevant and targeted.' It's in the feed that Amed says the real business – moneymaking – within digital media takes place. 'The best way to have influence as a brand on a website is to realise how to exist in the feed. Where you really have impact is when an independent blogger endorses the product because he or she really loves it.' Amed cites the example of Tommy Ton taking a photo of Proenza Schouler's PS 1 bag creating more impact than the brand posting an ad on Jak and Jill. 'It's done in his style and looks amazing.' Amed explains that Ton's site has been so successful because his point of view can't be replicated. 'He has an encyclopaedic eye, knowledge of fashion, and relationships with editors that enable him to shoot them candidly.'

'I am a fashion enthusiast before a photographer,' says Ton. 'I see a piece from Balenciaga fall 2002 and I scream. I get really excited about product and seeing how editors wear clothes.' Passion and knowledge motivate his photography. He tells the story of

Lee Radziwill's appearance at Giambattista Valli's show and his shock at the confusion among fellow bloggers. 'Why are you taking photos of that old woman?' one of them asked him. Then he mentions the time when one of his peers ran up to him to ask, 'What kind of lens do you use?' clearly interested in producing photos that would elicit a similar level of attention similar to that which Ton receives from the fashion cognoscenti. Ton examined the blogger's camera. 'The exact same one as you,' he said. 'Your photos look so different,' the baffled blogger replied.

Such stories illustrate the importance of possessing a distinctive perspective and platform to run a successful business in digital fashion media. Ton estimates that 15 per cent of his income is from licensing his images and 80 per cent from commercial projects, which are offered to him by brands wanting his unique point of view.

It's true that the competition for commissions has grown over the last few years, but so have the friendships. 'Phil Oh is one or two of my survival tools during fashion month,' says Ton, referring to Oh's sense of humour. 'We're like monkeys when we chase people down.'

In many ways Oh – blogger alias Street

editor of *Vogue* India. Pernet and Tewari were among his earliest supporters.

'I don't use the term "good friend" lightly,' Amed says. 'In some ways, I still feel like a fashion outsider, even though I have experience inside the industry every day. It's an interesting contradiction, but it really informs my point of view. I am still new enough to be curious about this world.'

Later, after the Sharon Wachob show, Amed stops in the nearby Dries van Noten shop to look at the clothes he saw on the runway some six months ago. Lately he has been acutely aware of the internet's impact on production post-presentation. 'What's happened has dramatically sped up the cycle of commerce. In years past, there might have been reviews in one or two papers; now there are images en masse direct from the runway,' he says. 'This creates demand for the clothes now, which is where projects like Moda Operandi come in. The operational cycle of fashion has to catch up with the communication cycle.'

It's bloggers who are responsible for disseminating these desires, but they too face new challenges. For example, how exactly does one monetise an independent blog? 'The successful bloggers have a unique, passionate

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Pepper – is also Ton's foil. Oh started taking pictures outside the Paris shows in 2007 and saw a market for a site that could be searched by designer label. In terms of profit, he now makes his living on equal parts special projects (he shoots for vogue.com), photo syndication and advertising. 'I wasn't particularly interested in fashion as a child or even as a teenager. I'm not a journalist or a fashion critic,' Oh says. 'I just take pictures of things that I like.'

It's a jam exiting Posen's show as photographers clamour around the Palais de Tokyo steps. Amed's tucked his phone away in the Calgary bag. He runs into Michelle Kessler Sanders and Jefferson Hack. There's an exchange of 'We should get together'.

When we arrive at Garage Turenne for Manish Arora's show, Amed greets Diane Pernet, one of pioneers who began in 2005 using blogging software on her Nokia phone. Pernet is a friend and early supporter of Amed's, the two met at a Charles Anastase show five years ago. 'What was lacking in fashion reporting was the business of fashion. That's what's lacking in the schools and lacking in general,' she says. Amed's phone stays active throughout the show. Afterwards, he greets Arora's business partner Deepak Bhagwani to whom he was introduced by his good friend Bandana Tewari, fashion features

point of view, they did not start blogging for fame,' says Amed. Pernet, for example, is often asked to curate projects on account of the experience and expertise displayed on her site. Amed cites Bryan Boy and Rumi Neely of Fashion Toast as examples of wonderful characters. Their commodity is having a personality which engages readers.

Bryan Boy estimates that 60 per cent of his income is from advertising, the other 40 per cent from styling projects and appearances. 'I love sharing stories. It's really about inspiring my readers to have dreams – bigger dreams than mine,' he says. Amed would argue that inclusion within one of Bryan Boy's posts is more effective than an ad on his site, because the reader trusts his judgement. 'At end of day, I only blog what I like,' says Bryan Boy.

Susie Bubble's Stylebubble is another example of a blog with a singular voice. Amed thinks Susie's lack of pretension and humble spin make her stand out. This has earned her freelance work from guest editing a newspaper for Selfridges to modelling in a Gap holiday ad campaign. 'Your blog is kind of like your calling card,' Susie says, echoing Ton's earlier sentiments.

Amed also likes John Jannuzzi's Textbook, a tumblr site that showcases literary or

historical characters dressed in looks from the season's collections. It's something no one else has done, which gives it exponential value. Jannuzzi, however, isn't yet interested in profiting from its popularity. 'The moment you put ads on your site, your audience's perception changes,' he says. 'Textbook makes no money, never has, never will, unless someone calls me and says they want to make this into a coffee-table book.'

Amed himself makes a living from his consultancy work, appearances and a few ads on BofF. 'I will not put fluorescent flashing animation on my website,' he says, explaining the importance of placements which appear seamless, both in subject and appearance. After all, it's in the feed.

'With the Business of Fashion he has captured the interest of people who aren't just interested in fashion,' says Ton of Amed. 'I think that's why he has so many followers on Twitter. He doesn't dumb it down; he makes you think. You can put him on a par with Miuccia Prada in what he has to say about fashion. He thinks about more than what's on the surface.'

It's for this reason that Amed has stayed close to certain designers: they appreciate his point of view, much in the same way that he