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The accidental style guru

How **Imran Amed** became one of the most important voices in the fashion business

IMRAN AMED RUNS the successful fashion blog The Business Of Fashion (BOF) and was recently voted one of the 100 Most Influential Men in Britain by GQ UK. A former McKinsey & Company employee and Harvard Business School graduate, he is now an advisor to several large global luxury brands as well as an associate lecturer at London's Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design, teaching a course on digital marketing. GQ India caught up with Amed when he was in Mumbai earlier this year,

to speak at an event at Lakmé Fashion Week.

When did you first become interested in fashion?

I'd always been interested in fashion as a consumer, but growing up in Calgary, Canada is about as far away from the fashion world as you can get. One thing that kept my interest was a half-hour show about fashion on CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] called *Fashion File*, which I would watch pretty religiously growing up.

How did you go from being a consultant at McKinsey to the fashion business?

Even while I was at McKinsey, I had one eye on the fashion business, and through personal friends and my work, I often met with people in fashion. I left McKinsey at the end of 2005, and spent seven-eight months exploring the idea of using venture capital for designers, to help them expand their businesses... In the end, I left the business before we'd made an investment. I made the mistake of rushing into a partnership that didn't ultimately work.

Why did you start blogging?

There were very few forums for discussing the business side of fashion at that time. There was *Women's Wear Daily*, the *Financial Times* did a supplement twice a year and *Time* had a quarterly magazine called *Time Style & Design* that sometimes had interesting business articles – but there wasn't one single destination. I didn't really know what I was doing or whether anyone was going to read it, but what's nice is that it's an iterative process. It's much easier than a magazine, and you can figure it out as you go along based on the feedback people give.

You're a consultant for several large luxury brands – does that conflict with your role as a commentator on the industry?

I don't write about projects that I have directly been involved with. From time to time, other writers on our team will want to speak to brands that I've worked with, and we do that. I've always been very upfront about the fact that I'm a consultant.

What has been the hardest lesson you've learnt with your blog, BOF?

One of the things that I've learnt is that BOF shouldn't be about trying to break news. I was at a dinner a year ago, and someone

told me about a project that a major luxury brand was working on, and said that there had been a meeting with the staff and a press release sent out that day about it. So I asked the person, "Is that tweetable?" and they said yes. So I tweeted it, and as it turned out, the brand had decided not to send out a press release yet. My phone started ringing, and the brand was unhappy. I learnt that in order to get great content, we need to have good relationships with the brands. Since then, I've taken a strong position that we're only doing analysis.

What do you think of how Indian fashion brands are marketing themselves?

Indian fashion brands aren't great at communicating with their audience, especially with regards to aesthetics and branding. There are a few that understand the power of marketing, but most don't. It's still early here, though, and it takes years to make a brand.

Which Indian designers do you think are the most pioneering?

Sabyasachi is putting clothes in the stores three weeks after they're on the runway. This kind of instant gratification could really change the way the fashion business works. It's like Apple, which is a fashion brand for the technology industry – it gets its products out there as the buzz is peaking, and because of its design ethic its products date, they actually go out of style. Everyone wants the new one!

Where are the biggest opportunities for would-be fashion entrepreneurs?

Right now, it's digital platforms and China. If you can get a foot in either, that's an exciting place to be. For people who want to develop something online, it's about finding an angle that you're passionate about rather than trying to fill a gap. ☺