

Amazon makes foray into fashion world

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The Seattle-based online retail titan has already revolutionized how consumers shop and has been selling clothes for more than a decade.

In 2006, it bought the site Shopbop and snapped up online footwear go-to Zappos three years later.

But its steps in recent months—some overt and others more under-the-radar—signal that Amazon is speeding up its foray into fashion.

For one, Amazon launched a daily, free half-hour online show on fashion in early March, its first-ever live-streaming program.

It also became the main partner of the fledgling New York Men's Fashion Week, which held its second season of shows in January.

And the giant founded by US entrepreneur Jeff Bezos has also begun airing "The Fashion Fund,"

a reality show during which young designers face off against each other in a competition sponsored by the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) that organizes New York Fashion Week.

As for its more muted moves—these are visible on Amazon.com where new fashion labels have popped up that, it turns out, have been trademarked by the tech giant.



Models present creations by Indian fashion designers during the Amazon India Fashion Week Autumn/Winter 2016 finale in New Delhi on March 20, 2016

The labels Lark & Ro, North Eleven and Franklin Tailored have been registered by Amazon over the past few months, according to data accessed by AFP on the website of the European Union Intellectual Property Office.

After focusing on clothes designed, made and sold by others, Amazon—whose revenue in 2015 passed the \$100 billion mark—is developing its own clothing lines.

When contacted by AFP on the topic, Amazon declined to comment.

"I'm happy to reach out once we are ready to share

news and overall strategy regarding our business," said a spokeswoman for Amazon Fashion.

"Amazon has made apparel a priority," analysts with KeyBanc Capital Markets wrote in a February research note after attending the MAGIC apparel trade show in Las Vegas.

'Plenty of opportunity'

"Amazon is being viewed as a strategic opportunity and partner" in the vendor community they wrote, with some believing that "it can be a top three customer for them in the medium-term."

Customers appear to like what's in the works.

"There's... the ability to have the world at your fingertips in one place," said Marshal Cohen, chief industry analyst at the NPD Group.

"Brand sites or traditional retail sites have limited offerings. Whereas when you look at Amazon, the offer of products is mind boggling," he added.

"The ability to reach across so many brands, so many styles, so many sizes, so many options, it gives a feeling of much greater opportunity to secure the product that you want."

Amazon has the potential to make a significant mark on the fashion world, according to Cohen.

"There's plenty of opportunity to better what has been done by the [fashion](#) industry, from a basic, and also midlevel and even from a designer perspective," he said.

Analysts at the Cowen Group said in July that they expected Amazon to become the leading US apparel retailer by 2017, ahead of Wal-Mart and Macy's.

They forecast \$27.7 billion in revenue next year and \$52 billion in 2020—and that in the United States alone.

On a more international front, chains such as H&M and Zara also have reason to be concerned.

If the inauguration late last year in Seattle of a brick-and-mortar bookstore is anything to go by, Amazon one day could decide to open ready-to-wear clothing stores.

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