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Technology Transforming the Fashion Industry

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Posted by Neal Leavitt on November 27th, 2014 at 5:28 pm

Last week after a nice lunch with my sister, niece, brother-in-law and cousin, I got corralled into following them into Nordstrom's in downtown San Francisco. I quickly realized that with only two magazines, a book, and a smartphone, it would be a challenging afternoon.

And once my niece pulled about a half-dozen outfits off a rack and said "I just want to try on a few things," the situation became untenable. Elevated heart rate. Accelerated pulse. Beads of sweat on forehead. If the store had started playing Slim Whitman songs, my head would have exploded, similar to what happened to the little green Martians in Tim Burton's campy *Mars Attacks*.

Quickly gave everyone a hug and said I was dashing out to Ghirardelli's for a sundae (dark chocolate hot fudge;

medical studies have indicated dark chocolate's good for you, ergo, Ghirardelli's sundaes are healthy. Bit of twisted logic but effective for assuaging any guilt feelings).

But while scraping away the last nanometer of ice cream, it got me thinking about how technology has radically changed the fashion industry in just a few short years.

"Technology is now completely ingrained in our interaction and relationship with fashion retail," said Arabella James, a futures consultant at The Future Laboratory. "It's now part of every shopping moment, from inspiration and production to purchase decision and transaction."

A few examples:

Forbes recently estimated that 3D printing will be a $3.1 billion industry by 2016; $5.2 billion by 2020. Models have already started wearing 3D-printed couture. And *Apparel* predicts the day will soon be at hand to see it, buy it, and print it shopping – "a consumer will spot a must-have article of clothing, complete the checkout transaction in seconds, and sit back and watch as their personal 3D printer whips up a custom fitted version right in the comfort of his home."

And Anish Singh, CTO of Fashion GPS, added that we'll soon see designers in offices, apartments and garages developing accessory prototypes or implementing full-on production sans middlemen.

"Imagine designers creating scale models of – well – of models wearing the designs they've created; how might those scale models be used to popularize and sell fashion? The possibilities are endless. The impacts will be enormous," said Singh.

News.com.au recently wrote about C&A, a Dutch chain of fashion retail clothing stores that launched a campaign combining online and in-store consumer decision making. Dubbed *FashionLike*, whenever someone 'likes' an item of clothing online at the C&A website, the 'like' "gets totaled on a screen embedded in a clothes hanger on the rack in store. Consumers can then decide whether they want the more popular clothes with the larger number of 'likes' or opt for the 'less liked' pieces."

And designer Rebecca Minkoff opened two tech savvy stores in New York and San Francisco this month. As reported by Elizabeth Holmes in *The Wall Street Journal*, each store has a large screen where customers can browse merchandise or request items in specific sizes to try on.

The store also texts shoppers when a fitting room is free and inside the room, a touch screen mirror is available to get more items or ask for assistance.

"Merchandise tags equipped with radio-frequency identification (RFID) technology track which items customers try on, and provide the store with a precise, real-time view of inventory. Meanwhile, employees use iPads to handle shoppers' requests and check out from anywhere in the store," said Holmes.

We've also seen innumerable stories about wearables – especially watches – over the past 12-18 months. But there have been a few recent developments with other types of wearables that are generating some buzz.

One of these is MICA – My Intelligent Communication Accessory. The $495 intelligent bracelet (announced Nov. 17) not only has precious gems and Ayers snakeskin, but includes two years of AT&T wireless data service provided by Intel. Opening Ceremony, an international retailer, designed the bracelet; it was engineered by Intel. Intel says the accessory will be available next month at Opening Ceremony New York and Los Angeles, select Barneys New York locations, and online at Openingceremony.us and Barneys.com.

And earlier this year, Cuff rolled out a nine-piece line of wearables, including bracelets, necklaces and, for the men, a key chain, all accompanied by the *CuffLinc* device. The Cuff app alerts people wearers designate as "first responders" when help is needed. Cuff sends an SOS to people you choose, and it doesn't stop until someone responds. Designated people receive your location, live audio, and other relevant information to get

you (or a loved one) any required assistance.

Lastly, renowned international designer Diane von Furstenberg unveiled *Made for Glass*

 – a designer collection for Google Glass.

Von Furstenberg best summed up the mind meld of fashion and technology:

"The definition of fashion is 'l'air du temps,' –the essence of the time we live in, so it is absolutely normal that it meets technology."

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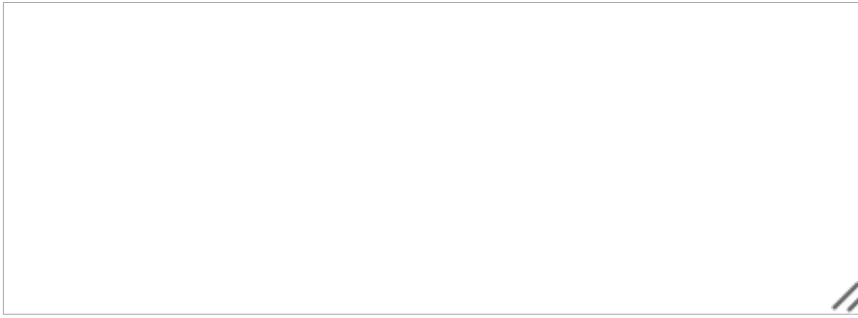- [Print This Post](#)
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