

EVENT MARKETING

Fashion has social import

Shoppers love fashion shows,
 but an event at Prime
 Outlets Orlando
 shows the industry's
 heart and depth.

By PATIENCE KRAMER
 Contributing Writer

LUXE 2009, the Orlando Ballet fashion benefit hosted by Prime Outlets Orlando, had shoppers on their toes. It also had shoppers whooping, clapping and standing on their chairs to shout out their approval as models bopped down the runway, showcasing the outlet center's designer fashions. The styles were beautifully assembled by the show's host, celebrity stylist Robert Verdi, whose client list includes Eve Longoria Parker and Kathy Griffin.

The Oct. 8 event, co-sponsored with *Orlando Style Magazine*, combined designer shopping with fashion and charity to draw a crowd of more than 400 customers. The benefit opened with a VIP reception in Saks Fifth Avenue Off 5th; the VIPs and customers then moved to the event tent where they mingled with dancers from the Orlando Ballet while enjoying cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, giveaways and the stunning show of fashion-forward ensembles on the runway. Vince, Ted Baker London, Escada, 7

for All Mankind, Judith Ripka, Michael Kors, Kate Spade and Betsey Johnson were among the luxury designers featured in the runway show.

Inspired by what they saw on the runway and energized by exclusive event discounts, shoppers rushed to area stores at the close of the hour-and-a-half event, intent on pumping up their own wardrobes with items featured in the show.

"Our shoppers liked having the expertise of a stylist to help guide them," says Karen Fluharty, senior VP-marketing for **Prime Retail**. "How Robert articulated that style and that vision was so important to the show and to our customers."

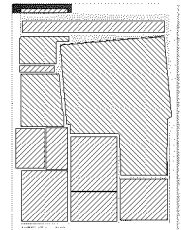
The event's reach extended well beyond Orlando, drawing more than 20 Latin American media reporters and underscoring the economic importance of the shopper traveler.

While the event's immediate beneficiaries were the center's tenants, the ballet company and other local charities, stylist Robert Verdi sees additional, equally positive outcomes.

"Having this kind of fashion experience makes people feel special," he says. "I think it's important to have these great events because it inspires people to shop and enjoy life."

He also values the accessibility to fashion that outlets offer.

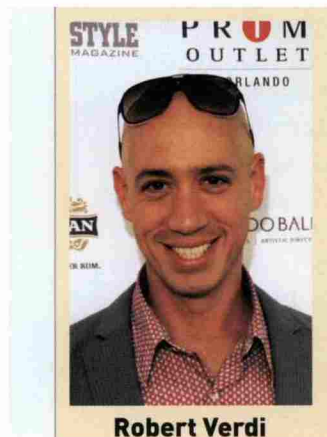
"I grew up in New Jersey and used to work in a mall," Verdi explains. "What I love about outlets is that they reach so many people. It's about fashion being democratic and for everyone. I love that Prime has assembled these destination stores – outlet centers are fabulous oysters filled with pearls."



Finally, Verdi sees a society-wide impact as well, one that especially resonates these days.

“During economic woes, when people are feeling a lot of anxiety, it’s important to realize that fashion isn’t just something that takes place on a runway,” Verdi says. “Fashion affects a lot of people. If we stop buying new clothes, or taking your clothes to the little tailor on the corner, or to the dry cleaner, those businesses and the families they support suffer. There are companies that manufacture hangers for the garment industry, and these companies employ hundreds of people. And when your UPS man delivers a package from Saks or J. Crew, they are putting food on the table. When you stop participating in the American commerce of fiber and fabric, the effect is immediate. Viewed this way, shopping is the right thing to do.”

Verdi has lent his name and talent to other charitable events and is especially committed to supporting the arts, assistance for women with breast cancer through the Cancer Vixen Fund and to organizations benefitting persons with AIDS. **M**





With funds raised from the Luxe 2009 fashion event, Prime Retail was able to donate \$5,000 to the Orlando Ballet.

