

E-Commerce Gets Collaborative

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By Robert McAllister, Technology Editor, Apparelnews.net : Collaboration has been the buzz in B2B software applications such as PLM (product lifecycle management) and ERP (enterprise resource planning). Now it's becoming more important in B2C applications. Two Bay Area Web resources have rolled out separate e-commerce entities that go straight to the horse's mouth to determine what clothing styles to sell on the Web.

Mountain View, Calif.-based ZenTrend and Emeryville, Calif.-based IndiCustom are taking similar concepts of using consumer input to sell apparel, but they are taking different approaches.

ZenTrend is a collaborative e-commerce site launched last year by former HP and Symantec executive Lekha Srinivasan. The site offers clothing from up-and-coming yet undiscovered designers in the contemporary and misses categories with price tags from \$30 to \$120. Merchandise ranges from beaded corsets to silk and lace dresses.

The main thrust behind the business is a new technology called iStyler, which is a collaborative platform enabling the site's visitors to take the seat of "Project Runway" judge Nina Garcia to give a thumbs-up or thumbs-down to designs via fashion illustrations by the designers. The input received helps determine whether the style makes the cut into next season's merchandise mix at ZenTrend. Consumers providing input are entered into a drawing for a prize.

"It gives the consumer more power. They tell us things like 'I really love that style, but if you offer it in taupe rather than red, I would buy it,'" Srinivasan said. "Historically, consumers are never really asked up front in the process of apparel design and manufacturing. They're pushed into what's available, what the designer has to offer. I wanted to change that."

ZenTrend actually contracts the production and manufacturing for the garments, using only illustrations, technical specifications, fit analysis or other pre-production processes from the selected designers, who receive compensation and are promoted and marketed through the site.

The company is currently working with several designers from Europe. Designers are required to have experience working with significant companies as well as have the ability to create sellable styles. The site features an area where designers can submit portfolios. And a portion of proceeds is donated to a number of charities.

"One of our visions is to promote these undiscovered designers and try to bring them to the forefront and provide them with a

platform,” Srinivasan said. “There’s a lot of talent out there that does not have the capital and resources to get their names known.”

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Zentrend is a collaborative global fashion boutique and community. It offers designer wear dresses for evening wear, party wear, cocktail wear and many more embroidered dresses, designer skirts, fashion tops and designer accessories.

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