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## Fashion Fringe Gets an Edge

**NEW YORK** — Fashion Fringe's mission is to identify young British and Irish talent, with an eye toward keeping them in London, and to this end the organization awards a 100,000-pound (\$187,738) prize to the winner of its annual design contest.

While that money may help launch a business, it's not necessarily enough to sustain one. Looking for new ways to help fledgling designers, Fringe creative director Colin McDowell has found a new way to advance careers and sell clothes through a partnership with Yoox.com, an Italian e-commerce site.

"I wanted to find a young and different way of selling clothes," McDowell said. "Retailers have a difficult problem. They have to sell clothes from known designers. Any young designer working on a shoestring can't begin to bring himself to the notice of the general public."

With 2.5 million visitors per month, Yoox.com can expose the winners of the third annual Fashion Fringe competition to a broad audience.

"Yoox.com is vast and will be able to sell clothing much more quickly and efficiently, and much more widely, than if a young designer had their line in some small boutique in London," McDowell said. "Yoox.com is keen to reposition itself and take on a leadership role and feature young designers."

Federico Marchetti, founder of Yoox.com, said putting the winner of the Fashion Fringe competition on the Web site is a natural continuation of Yoox.com's The Wild Bunch, a feature that presents an international array of lesser-known designers. Previous designers have included Alexandre Herchcovitch from Brazil, Hamish Morrow from the U.K. and Paris-based Bernard Wilhelm.

"We will be for Fashion Fringe what we've been for Wild Bunch, which is global, a communications platform," Marchetti said, noting that the selection of a Fashion Fringe winner will take place in September. The winning designer's collection will appear on the site early next year.

Marchetti believes there's a market for edgy fashion on the Web site. "Yoox.com is a store, and our objective is to sell," he said. "Most of our customers are interested in the experimental things Yoox is offering. They see it as a kind of education. Great Britain is the most cutting-edge place to source products and get trends."

Fashion Fringe has uncovered some promising designers. Basso & Brook won the award in 2004. Last year's winner was Erdem Moralioglu.

Tom Ford, who is on board as honorary chairman, should help raise Fringe's profile.

McDowell said he started Fringe because he "felt bad that most of our really good designers were moving away. Nearly all of them are working outside of London," he said, citing John Galliano, Vivienne Westwood and Alexander McQueen. "I want to encourage young, up-and-coming talent to stay in London long enough to give something back to London. The fashion industry in London has been allowed to slip away to so very little."

— Sharon Edelson