

## Fashion Site to Try an All-Purpose Portal

By BOB TEDESCHI

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WHEN some of Silicon Valley's best minds pool their collective intelligence and millions of dollars to create a Web site for people who want to read about and buy everything in Lindsay Lohan's closet, you know the Internet industry is ready to party again.

*Samir Arora,  
chief  
executive of  
Glam Media,  
at the Kirna  
Zabete store  
in Manhattan,  
one of the  
site's  
advertising  
partners.*



Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

Glam.com, a fashion site scheduled to make its debut today after nearly two years in development, is of a genre not heard from since the heady days of the dot-com bubble: a so-called vertical portal offering articles, user-to-user dialogue and merchandise, all within the confines of a narrow topic.

And the topic is fashion, of all things - a choice that at first glance seems ill-suited to attract Internet consumers whose main obsession is knocking \$10 off an airline ticket, and equally unlikely to tempt the

millions of women who remain perfectly happy thumbing through their Vogue and InStyle magazines.

But analysts and executives said Glam.com stood a fighting chance, partly because no one had been willing to jump on this particular grenade for years, and because this time around the grenade might not actually explode.

"I think it's a very good time for this," said Heather Dougherty, an analyst with Nielsen/NetRatings, an Internet consulting firm. "The advertising market is obviously far stronger than a few years ago, and Glam is going after a lot of luxury brands that hadn't yet come online then, and who still might be hesitant about it, and offering them a very controlled environment to test the waters."

In essence, Glam.com is an online fashion magazine in which every item can be purchased via a couple of clicks. Products range from \$16 Benefit lipstick to \$1,500 Jimmy Choo handbags arrayed across several categories, including trends, celebrity styles and noteworthy products. The editorial team is headed by Carl Portale, previously a publisher of Elle magazine, and includes a stable of former fashion magazine editors and contributors.

The site provides a Shops section for those who require no inspiration before clicking off to selected offerings from, say, Bergdorf Goodman or Neiman Marcus. It also serves up interactive tests on subjects like what to wear to a formal party or how to dress to project a sexy look.

Such tests are a staple of fashion magazines, but they are also a focal point in the career of the Glam Media chairman and co-founder, Samir Arora, the former chairman of Tickle, a social networking and quiz site that has achieved considerable popularity in recent years.

While the site has a lot of editorial content - enough to fill 1,400 pages of a magazine - it is the quizzes that Mr. Arora sees as playing a critical role in generating return visits. A user's responses are stored and analyzed, he said, so that "as the system grows, you'll learn more about yourself, and we use that to do more style matches for you."

Users may also share their style matches and quiz results on the site with friends or strangers with similar fashion preferences. "So this isn't just like InStyle magazine, it's InStyle built to you," Mr. Arora said.

Upscale fashion advertisers and retailers, many of whom have engaged in few Internet initiatives until now, said they liked Glam's editorial approach because it helped them retain the blush of exclusivity while also allowing customers easy access to their products.

"It's indirect selling. That's a big part of it," said Stacy Lastrina, senior vice president of marketing and creative services for Jones Apparel Group, which includes Nine West, Ann Klein and other brands. "We have to be very careful where we put our brands, and they've done a great job of understanding that."

While advertisers laud the site's editorial approach, they also give it high marks for solving a nagging technology problem: how to let users buy items easily. Web sites related to fashion magazines, like shopvogue.com from Advance Media and ShopEtc.com from Hearst, have over the last year offered links to goods advertised in their magazines, but users are often left off at the home page of an advertiser's store rather than being linked directly to the item, and without knowing whether the item is in stock.

Glam has plugged into the back-office systems of its roughly 70 affiliated retailers, which include upscale boutiques like Kirna Zabete, so buyers can see with one click whether the item is in stock. If it is, they are taken directly to the merchant's checkout page for that item.

Glam takes a commission of 12 percent to 24 percent on every purchase made on the site, Mr. Arora said, and advertising rates are "very premium, given our target audience." Mr. Arora, who raised \$11 million in funding from venture capital firms like Accel Partners and Draper Fisher Jurvetson, said it was too early to say how much revenue would come from either source.

But Glam will not have a lot of competition, at least at first. Fashion magazines could set up shop in the Internet, too, said Charlene Li, an analyst with the technology consulting firm Forrester Research, but "they're terrified of losing subscription revenue, and it's a hugely different approach from their regular print efforts, so it'd be a lot of work."

For the time being, then, Glam should have a fair amount of running room to test out its concept. And retailers who have joined the initiative have high hopes. Sarah Easley, co-owner of Kirna Zabete, said she had turned away many other Internet companies who wanted to feature her store's items, "because they weren't designer-driven enough. But we have a good feeling about this, so we're going to roll the dice."